United Nations S/PV.7673

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7673rd meeting
Monday, 18 April 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. McCully
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-10775 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cuba, Iceland, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Maldives, Morocco, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sweden, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

It is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. João Pedro Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, and His Excellency Mr. Wilfried I. Emvula, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, to whom I now give the floor.

The Secretary-General: I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East.

In just a few days, the Jewish people will celebrate one of Judaism's most important holidays, Passover. I extend my best wishes to my Jewish friends and colleagues for a happy and peaceful holiday.

Allow me to begin with my visit to Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia three weeks ago with the President of the World Bank, Mr. Jim Yong Kim. Our trip sought to highlight the need to increase development assistance through innovative financing mechanisms for countries, like Lebanon and Jordan, that are disproportionately impacted by the conflict in Syria. Last Friday, together with the Presidents of the World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank, I co-chaired a ministerial-level conference to garner the financial support for that initiative. I am pleased to inform members that we had an encouraging response. Eight countries and the European Union generously pledged $1 billion for a concessional loan facility, $141 million in grants and $500 million for a guarantee facility. In addition, many other countries expressed support for this innovative initiative and their intention to provide financial support. I hope that donors will continue to respond to this effort to invest in peace and stability in the region.

For over six months, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory have been gripped by a surge in violence, triggered by individual terrorist attacks by Palestinians. Approximately 30 Israelis and 200 Palestinians have been killed, with most of the Palestinians killed while reportedly carrying out knife, gun or car-ramming attacks. I condemn all such attacks unreservedly. There can never be any justification for stabbings, vehicle attacks, shootings, incitement to violence or the glorification of killers.

I welcome the joint Palestinian-Israeli efforts that have contributed to a reduction of tensions in recent weeks. However, these latest killings have only deepened the divisiveness, hatred and grief. I also welcome the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian security discussions on Area A. I urge all sides to recognize the risks of failing to reach a lasting understanding on this pressing matter. I acknowledge the recent public statements by President Abbas rejecting violence and terror and firmly supporting continued security coordination with Israel. President Abbas and I discussed the importance of those and other issues in Amman on 27 March. I encourage more such statements, backed by concrete actions. Israelis and Palestinians need their leaders to elevate public discourse above mutual accusations and

to engage in a constructive dialogue that can rebuild the trust that has all but evaporated.

The Middle East Quartet is moving forward on a report that will review the situation on the ground and the threats to a two-State solution and provide recommendations on how to advance peace. The report is intended to help inform international discussions to advance the two-State solution: a sovereign and independent State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel. Tragically, that solution seems more distant than it has for many decades. A 20-year-old Palestinian living under occupation has seen no political progress at all during his or her lifetime. Impatience and despair at that fact is one of the root causes of the violence that blights Israeli and Palestinian communities, prevents economic development and growth and denies the human potential of millions of people. It is incumbent upon all of us to do everything in our power to secure lasting peace.

Our collective efforts face dynamics in Israel and Palestine that call into question the willingness of the parties to overcome the hurdles to peace. Israel continues to demolish Palestinian structures in the occupied West Bank at an alarming rate. The total number of demolitions in 2015 was exceeded in early April of this year. More than 840 people have been displaced. Most of the structures concerned are deemed illegal by Israel because they were built without permits; yet Israel makes it almost impossible for Palestinians to acquire permits. These acts raise concerns that Israel intends to implement over 11,000 outstanding demolition orders in Area C of the West Bank.

I am also concerned by the continued punitive demolitions of homes belonging to families of alleged Palestinian perpetrators of attacks against Israelis. Punitive demolitions are a form of collective punishment, which is prohibited under international law. They are unproven as a deterrent and they fuel tensions by exacerbating feelings of injustice and hatred.

Meanwhile, settlement plans and retroactive legalizations continue to advance in almost untraceable steps through the complicated planning process. Those steps, together with last month's declaration of "State land" — the first in over 18 months — signal that Israel's strategic settlement enterprise continues to expand on land intended for a future Palestinian State. I once again reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the two-State solution.

The creation of new facts on the ground through demolitions and settlement-building raises questions about whether Israel's ultimate goal is in fact to drive Palestinians out of certain parts of the West Bank, thereby undermining any prospect for a transition to a viable Palestinian State.

On the Palestinian political front, I regret the continued failure of intra-Palestinian discussions to achieve genuine unity on the basis of non-violence, democracy and the Palestine Liberation Organization principles. I reiterate my call on Palestinian factions to demonstrate their commitment to reconciliation, which is integral to reaching the goal of Palestinian statehood and to securing a just and lasting resolution to the conflict. It is imperative for all factions to ensure that both Gaza and the West Bank are returned to the control of a single, democratic and legitimate Palestinian Authority.

I am extremely concerned by today's announcement on the uncovering of a tunnel crossing from Gaza into Israel — the first such discovery since the 2014 Gaza conflict. I strongly condemn the construction of attack tunnels as dangerous and provocative moves that not only threaten the lives of Israelis and Palestinians, but also undermine efforts to rebuild Gaza. Furthermore, three rockets were fired from Gaza towards Israel on 14 April, all of which landed short of Israel. No injuries were reported. I call upon all parties to refrain from any actions that could lead to renewed conflict in Gaza.

The Palestinian Government has laid out an ambitious $3.8 billion agenda for stabilizing Gaza, repairing damage from the 2014 conflict and getting a recovery under way. Economic development and rebuilding critical electricity and water infrastructure are essential. On 8 April, the Gaza power plant shut down, meaning that residents of Gaza are now supplied with electricity for just four to six hours per day. More than a year and a half after the conflict in Gaza, those conditions are intolerable. I strongly encourage all Member States to fulfil their commitments to support the reconstruction and development of Gaza.

More positively, on 3 April, Israel expanded the Gaza fishing zone from six to nine nautical miles. I welcome that development and encourage Israel to expedite further easing measures to support the long-suffering people of Gaza.

Turning briefly to Lebanon, I had an opportunity to address political and security issues with Lebanese

leaders in Beirut on 24 and 25 March, consistent with the concerns of the Council. These include the importance of preserving Lebanon's model of pluralism and coexistence from regional tensions; the urgency of electing a president without further delay; the need for all parties to work with Prime Minister Tammam Salam to enable the Government to function effectively and to continue to engage in political dialogue; the importance of sustained international support for the Lebanese Armed Forces; and the expectation that both Lebanon and Israel will work to consolidate stability along the Blue Line and advance the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

I also discussed the importance of actively supporting the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, particularly in the light of the recent buildup of tensions in Palestinian camps, including a car bomb on 12 April that killed a camp official near Ein el Hilweh.

Turning to the Golan, I note the statements made yesterday by Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel. This is a long-standing issue that all parties have a responsibility to help resolve. I remind Israel of its obligation to implement Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 497 (1981) in all of their parts.

The path out of the current political deadlock requires commitment, compromise, mutual respect and leadership on both sides. It also requires the acceptance — demonstrated by deeds as well as words — that the two-State solution is the only road to peace that meets the national aspirations of both peoples: Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, I wish to express the State of Palestine's congratulations to China on its skilled leadership in the presidency of the Security Council this month and also express appreciation for the convening of today's important open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his briefing on the current situation and for his continuous efforts to address this long-standing issue on the United Nations agenda in the interest of peace and justice.

Since our last debate in January, we have addressed the Security Council on a near-weekly basis regarding the critical situation in occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem, as a result of Israel's illegal and destructive policies and measures. In each communication to the Council, we have tried to draw urgent attention to the grave breaches of international humanitarian law and human rights violations being systematically committed by the occupying Power, including its occupying forces and terrorist settlers. We have equally appealed for urgent action, in line with international law, to compel Israel to halt its crimes and violations, which are inflicting widespread suffering on the Palestinian civilian population, further inflaming tensions and destabilizing the situation, destroying the two-State solution and sabotaging the chances for a peaceful solution.

Regrettably, this has all been to no avail. The Security Council remains paralysed, failing to uphold its obligations in accordance with its Charter duties, international law and its own resolutions. It continues — debate after debate, consultation after consultation and letter after letter — to disregard the global calls to act seriously to stanch this open, bleeding wound in the international body by upholding international law and fulfilling its duty to advance a solution to the conflict that would assist the Palestinian people to finally realize the freedom, rights and justice they have been unjustly denied and to achieve Palestinian-Israeli peace, security and coexistence.

Indeed, those are the principal objectives at the core of every appeal we have made to the Council, week after week, month after month, year after year, decade after decade. Our appeals have all been made in full accordance with international law, not founded on some baseless claim or desire. Nothing that we come to this Chamber to ask for is beyond the realm of legality, beyond the parameters of justice or beyond the imperatives of peace.

And yet, every time we approach the Security Council, we are chided by a Council member and told that it is either not the right time or not the appropriate venue to address the matter, or, ironically, that the peace process will somehow be undermined by our seeking rights and peace, or that the doors of the Council are totally closed, period.

When will it ever be the right time to approach the Council? At what point of crisis will the Council be galvanized to finally act?

After years of restraint — years of a dramatic decline in the situation to dangerous levels; years of unquantifiable loss and suffering for the Palestinian people; years of destruction of the two-State solution and obstruction of the prospects for peace; and years of immense damage to the Security Council's credibility and the rule of international law — we can no longer wait and can no longer accept excuses and pretexts, domestic or otherwise, that permit violations of the law and of our people's rights by the occupying Power, with total impunity.

On the ground, the corrosive attrition of the two-State solution by Israel's illegal settlement activities has been unrelenting. The confiscation and de facto annexation of land, settlement construction, wall construction, the demolition of Palestinian homes and property, and the forced transfer of Palestinian civilians continue unabated, all with utter contempt for and in grave breach of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Security Council's resolutions, and in blatant mockery of the international community's demands for an end to all Israeli settlement activities.

During the 26 January open debate (see S/PV.7610), we heard loud and clear the reaffirmations of the illegality of Israel's settlement activities and the unanimous calls for a halt to all such policies and measures. What we have witnessed instead is the intensification of this illegal behaviour, further fragmenting the contiguity of our State's territory and gravely undermining the viability of the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders.

Thousands more dunums of Palestinian land have been confiscated by Israel in the West Bank, with more than 2,300 dunums slated for expropriation south of Jericho and more than 1,200 dunums south of Nablus in the span of one week alone. Home demolitions by the occupying Power have also alarmingly spiked, as reported by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, with more than 586 homes or structures demolished and more than 700 Palestinians forcibly displaced and rendered homeless since the start of the year.

Bedouin Palestine refugees have been especially affected by the demolitions, and entire communities are threatened with forced transfer. Of course, the recent period has also witnessed the advancement of plans for the construction of hundreds of additional settlement units, including in the past week, when the occupying Power decided to proceed with the construction of at least 250 settlement units, which will end up housing thousands more Israeli settlers, adding to the over 650,000 settlers already illegally transferred to the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The stark reality is that, as reported by the Israeli organization Peace Now, plans for the construction of Israeli settlements increased by 250 per cent in the first quarter of 2016, as compared to the same period last year. We are therefore compelled to ask the Council: does that not seriously call into question, once again, the credibility of Israel's professed commitment to the two-State solution, or of ever ending its occupation of our land? How can those facts in any way be reconciled with the Council's clear demands for an end to Israel's settlement activities and to all attempts to alter the demography, character and status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, according to its own resolutions? When will the Council hold Israel accountable for those violations and insist on compliance, the minimum, most essential requirement for upholding the law, overcoming that major obstacle to peace and preserving the possibility of the two-State solution?

In tandem with Israel's colonization of our land, it continues its aggression against our people, with Palestinian casualties mounting as a result of daily military raids by Israeli occupying forces and violence and terror attacks by extremist Israeli settlers, in no small part fuelled by the incitement and inflammatory rhetoric of Israeli Government officials, including by the Israeli Prime Minister and members of his Cabinet, and by extremist religious figures.

Since the current unrest began, in October 2015, more than 200 Palestinian men, women and children have been killed, with the bodies of many of those killed withheld by the occupying Power, even denying them dignity in death. As they did in the war on Gaza in 2014, the occupying forces have also continued to use excessive force, injuring more than 16,000 people, including thousands of children and women, in the past six months. That same period has also witnessed the detention of more than 4,000 Palestinians, adding to

the ranks of over 7,000 Palestinians, among them 450 children, now imprisoned or detained by Israel.

Our children and youth are being especially targeted and traumatized by this cruel occupation as Israeli occupying forces operate on a blatant shoot-to-kill policy, with children as young as 13 years of age shot and killed without consequences. The stories of Palestinian children and youth killed in broad daylight, including those extrajudicially murdered by the occupying forces, have become too numerous to recount. Nevertheless, in our weekly letters to the Council, we have tried to draw attention to those brutal murders and to share the names of the innocent human lives so violently taken and so tragically lost.

Faced with such relentless aggression by the occupation, Palestinian children, one generation after another, are being permanently scarred and the present and future fabric of our society is being destroyed. And yet the Security Council remains silent and the Palestinian people continue to be denied the protection they are in dire need of, and entitled to, in accordance with international humanitarian law. The reality is that a defenceless civilian population is being left to the merciless brutality of this military occupation, which has lasted almost half a century, an occupation whose forces are armed to the teeth with the most lethal and sophisticated military weaponry.

Our appeals for protection have been met with sympathy at best and indifference at worst. We have been repeatedly told to be reasonable about what the Council can or cannot do, in spite of the Council's own legislation, including resolutions 605 (1987) and 904 (1994), which clearly call the for protection of the Palestinian people, and in spite of the study of precedents shared by the Secretary-General with the Council in October 2015, which has not been the subject of one serious discussion. The failure to protect, as in all other cases in history, will only foster greater Israeli impunity and disregard for Palestinian life, endangering even more innocent civilians. The Security Council has not even held a discussion on the issue of protection. How shameful of an act is that on the shoulders of the members of the Security Council.

At a time when the situation is reaching boiling point, the passivity and silence of the Security Council is truly shocking. Stopping the deterioration of the situation and salvaging the prospects for peace require responsible action without delay. While we have heard repeatedly how unsustainable the status quo is, in fact there is no status quo and the situation, far from being static, is worsening every single day, inching towards an implosion.

The Council cannot stand idly by waiting for the next full-blown crisis. It is illogical and unacceptable to continue appeasing Israel's intransigence and arrogant, reckless flouting of the law. Israel must be held accountable for its crimes and violations of an entire people's rights, including to self-determination and freedom, once and for all. We have said it before in the Chamber and we must repeat it again: the crisis is existential and we can no longer wait.

We will therefore act responsibly to uphold our duties to the Palestinian people and will continue to do whatever we can in the international arena, foremost here at the United Nations and fully based on international law, using all diplomatic, political, legal and non-violent means, to redress the plight of our people, alleviate their suffering and advance the realization of their rights, justice and peace.

We have therefore begun our efforts and continue our appeals for the Council to act through the adoption of a clear and firm draft resolution to address the immediate issues before us, including, inter alia, the illegality of the Israeli settlement campaign and its destructive impact on the two-State solution; the increasing extremism and violence of Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians and the need for their protection; and the urgency of international and regional efforts, particularly within the context of the Arab Peace Initiative, to create a credible political horizon and support the parties to de-escalate the volatile situation, rebuild trust and uphold their legal obligations and commitments towards resolving all final status issues and achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Consultations are under way with Egypt, as the Arab representative in the Security Council, along with our other partners in the Arab Ministerial Committee, for a decision on when to formally proceed. We welcome the support of all concerned parties in regard to that effort and the calls for the Council to uphold its duties towards the question of Palestine before the situation further unravels, more innocent lives are lost and the two-State solution is relegated to the archives of history.

In that regard, we also commend the efforts being undertaken by the Quartet, as well as by the Government of France. We note that the French initiative in particular emphasizes the urgency of the matter — a matter that cannot be shelved or placed on a backburner until all other crises in the Middle East are resolved and one that, if left unattended, will only foster greater Israeli impunity and create a more fertile ground for radicalization on both sides — and also significantly emphasizes the need for a collective process, with the serious engagement and support of international and regional partners, including a role for the Security Council, to help the parties resolve all final status issues and finally bring an end to the occupation and the conflict as whole.

It is time to stop managing the conflict. This conflict is not intractable. Its solution has long been known and firmly rooted in United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. The international community must move beyond slogans and professing its commitment to human rights, justice and the two-State solution in theory, and actually mobilize the political will to resolve the conflict. The alleviation of the humanitarian crisis in Palestine can never replace a just solution as the ultimate objective.

It is surreal to witness the collective hand-wringing of the international community at the deplorable humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, as if it were caused by an uncontrollable natural disaster rather than the man-made disaster that it really is, wantonly inflicted by the Israeli war machine and the illegal Israeli blockade — by air, land and sea — that has isolated, impoverished, traumatized and dehumanized the entire Palestinian civilian population of Gaza. Despite the deeply regrettable political divide in Palestine and the prolonged efforts to achieve reconciliation and unity as a matter of national urgency, the failure to bridge that divide cannot be used as an excuse to continue imprisoning 1.8 million people and forcing them to live in the ruins of war and in mass deprivation.

Faced with that reality, in addition to Israel's relentless onslaught against the Palestinian civilian population and colonization in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, how can it be expected that our people, especially our youth, maintain any belief in international law and the international community's promises to uphold it? How can they maintain any hope that this injustice will end? And, in the absence of hope and belief, how is it possible to stave off despair and push back against the tide of radicalism and extremism plaguing our world?

The time is long overdue for ending the suffering of the Palestinian people under this illegal foreign occupation and ensuring the realization of their inalienable human rights, including to self-determination and freedom in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution to the Palestine plight, the most protracted refugee crisis in the world. If reason, responsibility and legal obligations fail to move the Council, perhaps reflecting on the immense human suffering caused by this inhumane occupation might create compassion and invoke moral responsibility to act.

There are too many compelling human stories to tell, but I wish to conclude with one today. On a recent visit to the Aida refugee camp in the West Bank, an Australian Premier, Michael Baird, met with a group of young Palestinian children and asked one of the boys what he dreamed of becoming when he was older. The boy's response was,

> "It's hard to have dreams when you know they can't come true."

When children feel they cannot even dream, we must acknowledge the depths of despair and hopelessness and human devastation that this occupation and conflict have wrought. We must also acknowledge the depths of our failure. We can no longer ignore or postpone the urgency to act. Reviving their hope, rectifying this historic injustice, making peace a reality and saving the future generations of both Palestinian and Israeli children depend upon it.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Once again we have gathered to discuss the Middle East, Israel and the Palestinians. Time and time again we meet in this Chamber for this debate. We hear very long discussions about the nature of the conflict and new proposals to solve it. But the root of the conflict is not very hard to understand, and the solution is clear.

For 67 years, Israel has been pursuing peace. Despite decades of war and rejection, we never gave up on that goal. Israel finally achieved peace when two brave Arab leaders, President Sadat and King Hussein, chose to lay down their arms. They chose the path of cooperation and partnership over the misery of war and

conflict. That was the key to peace with Egypt in 1981. That was the key to peace with Jordan in 1994. And it is the key to peace with the Palestinians today.

The Palestinian people deserve peace. They deserve a brighter, better future. Therefore, let me be clear. On the day the Palestinian leadership rejects terror and violence, on the day they embrace coexistence and cooperation, that is the day there will be peace. But is that what the Palestinian leadership really wants? Do they really want peace? If those gathered here believe that to be true, then they will have to explain a few inconvenient facts.

Fact number one is that the Palestinian leadership refuses to condemn the murder of Israeli men, women and children. Let me ask everyone in the Chamber: do not Israeli lives matter?

Fact number two is that the Palestinian Authority glorifies terrorism and terrorists. They name squares after suicide bombers and hang posters of them on school walls. Tell me, when did terrorism become heroism?

Fact number three is that Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, refuses to even sit down with Prime Minister Netanyahu. How can we make peace if we cannot even talk? Just recently, the Palestinian Foreign Minister, Riyad Al-Maliki, said loudly and clearly,

> "We will never go back and sit again in a direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiation."

We understand that members of the Council may not have answers to those questions. What we do not understand is why we do not demand answers.

The State of Israel and the people of Israel do not have any more time to wait for answers. For decades we have been facing Palestinian terrorism. In just the last few months, Israelis have faced a wave of non-stop daily attacks by Palestinian terrorists: over 300 separate attacks in 176 days. That means two terror attacks per day, every day, for half a year. That is the reality. Thirty-four people have been killed, and hundreds have been injured. How has the Palestinian leadership responded? Have they stopped the daily calls for violence that are fuelling the bloodshed? Has there been a clear condemnation by the Palestinian leadership? The answer is no. Instead of condemning those attacks, they encourage them. They reward terrorists and their families with monthly salaries. The more horrific the attack, the more horrific the crime, the higher the payment. In Palestinian society, terrorists are treated like heroes.

This year, we all participated in the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. On International Women's Day, official Palestinian Authority television called Dalal Mughrabi a role model for Palestinian women. For those who may not know or who may not remember, Dalal Mughrabi was a terrorist. In 1978, she hijacked an Israeli bus and murdered 38 innocent people, including 13 children. This is the woman the Palestinians have turned into a national symbol.

These are facts we never seem to hear in this Chamber. Instead, some are all too eager to offer justification for Palestinian terror and excuses for violence. Many find it convenient to ignore the basic truth: the endless incitement and the ongoing glorification of violence is directly responsible for the murder of innocent Israelis.

For many Palestinians, incitement is a daily reality. Children go to school and listen to tales of terrorists. Teenagers turn on the television and see a constant flow of images of hate and violence. Young adults go to mosques and hear sermons demonizing Israel and calling for its destruction, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

This reality has deadly consequences. On 17 January, a young Israeli mother was painting the door of her house when she was brutally attacked by a 16-year-old Palestinian terrorist. She was repeatedly stabbed at the entrance to her home. Knowing her children were inside, a few metres away, she heroically fought the terrorist. Even as she was bleeding to death, she stopped him from pulling the knife from her body. With her last ounce of strength, she made sure that the terrorist could not use the knife again to attack her six children.

That woman's name was Dafna Meir. Dafna was a hospital nurse from Otniel, a loving wife and a mother of six. At her funeral, Dafna's husband, Natan, said,

> "You left me six treasures, I will keep them safe for you. My Dafna is one in a million. My Dafna, thank you for every moment I had with you."

One of those treasures, Dafna's eldest daughter, Renana, said,

> "I didn't just lose a mother, but also my best friend. It's hard for me to think we will not laugh together or fight anymore, that you won't accompany me down the aisle and to the maternity ward."

Today, Natan and Renana are here with us in the Chamber, sitting behind me. They lost a wife and a mother. They paid the most painful price.

We have to ask ourselves why that happened. What drives a 16-year-old boy to stab another human being to death? The Palestinian teenager — he was arrested — gave us the answer in his confession. He said that what made him want to kill a Jew, any Jew, was a television show on Palestinian television. The Palestinian culture of hate and constant brainwashing is responsible for the loss of too many Israelis, and it is directly responsible for the murder of Dafna Meir.

It is time for real answers, it is time for the truth. Since no one else will ask the hard questions, I will. In the name of the people of Israel, in the name of the Israeli victims, and in the name of the family of Dafna Meir, let me ask the Palestinian observer here with us today. Mr. Mansour, will you condemn Palestinians who commit terror attacks against Israelis?

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): **[Inaudible]**

Mr. Danon (Israel): We are saying it all the time. You should say it in Arabic, not in English. You should teach it in your schools. You should stop the hatred. You should stop naming streets after terrorists. Look at the squares in Ramallah. Look at the streets in Jenin. You are naming streets after terrorists.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): [...] against incitement. Are you willing to come and attend these meetings in the presence of the Americans?

Mr. Danon (Israel): We condemn all terrorism — in Hebrew, in English, in Arabic.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): We condemn the killing of all innocent civilians, including Palestinian civilians. Do you do the same?

Mr. Danon (Israel): You are paying them. You are paying the families of terrorists.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Do you do the same?

Mr. Danon (Israel): You are glorifying terrorism. Shame on you for doing that.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): We do not. We do not.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Shame on you for glorifying terrorism.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Shame on you for killing thousands of Palestinian children.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Shame on you for not saying, "We condemn all acts of terror, period." That is what we are saying. We condemn all acts of terror. That is what I want you to say, Mr. Mansour. You are being translated into five languages. You can say it right now.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I ask the representative of Israel to continue with his statement.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Silence can be deafening, but in our region silence kills. It is time for the Palestinian leadership to end its silence and to start acting as leaders. Mr. Mansour, you cannot condemn terrorism, you cannot say it here: "I condemn all acts of terror." You cannot say it here. People are looking to you, Palestinian children are looking to you right now and you cannot say, "I condemn all acts of terrorism." One sentence you cannot say. One sentence you cannot say. Shame on you for that. Shame on you for not being able to say it.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): You are oppressing us. You are sitting on our lives. Leave us alone. Let my people be free.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Shame on you.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Shame on you. You are the occupier. You are a colonizer.

Mr. Danon (Israel): We have heard your excuses, but we have not heard any condemnation.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Leave us alone.

Mr. Danon (Israel): All of us, or maybe all of us, around this table know what it takes to be a leader. Leaders assume responsibility. Leaders speak out. Leaders educate. For the sake of the next generation, this is the lesson the Palestinians must learn. On the day Palestinian leaders, like Mr. Mansour, publicly condemn terror against Israelis — publicly — on the day they end their campaign of hate and violence, on the day respect for all — all — human beings is taught in Palestinian schools, on that day they will find a partner ready to work with them for the promise of peace. The State of Israel and the people of Israel continue to hope that that day will come soon.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now give the floor to members of the Security Council.

I call on Mr. Murray McCully, Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand.

Mr. McCully (New Zealand): I would like to start by thanking the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and realistic briefing.

Next Saturday, it will be two years since negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians were suspended. In the meantime, violence has escalated, the settlements have continued and trust between the two parties has been further eroded. And the Council has been largely a spectator.

It has been accepted wisdom in the Council, and in the eyes of the international community, that a two-State solution is the only path forward for resolving this matter. Yet today it is becoming increasingly apparent that such a solution may be moving beyond reach and that, if matters continue as they have for the past two years without action from the Council and others, the two-State solution will be dead. Against that background it is difficult to understand why the Security Council has not adopted a single resolution on this question in more than seven years, and that it could be a silent witness to the demise of the two-State solution.

What does the international community therefore expect of the Security Council in the difficult circumstances of today? First, it expects the Council to reassert a two-State solution as the only pathway to a secure and lasting peace. And it undoubtedly expects it to condemn the violence on both sides and the ongoing settlements programme as unacceptable obstacles to such a solution. Secondly, they expect the Council to support and give momentum to the work taking place outside the Council in the Quartet, among the members of the Arab League, and through the proposed French international conference. That work is necessary to rebuild confidence and trust and to prepare the parties for negotiations. And, thirdly, at the right time, they expect the Council to endorse a pathway back to negotiations, potentially through a resolution on parameters.

Opinions differ as to how some of those elements should be sequenced. In particular, there is debate as to whether a Council resolution focused on preserving a two-State solution, ending the violence and rhetoric and halting the settlements might best precede the proposed French conference or whether it might follow it. But I believe there is broad agreement on the content of those three phases.

When New Zealand proposed a draft text last year, in the absence of any alternatives, we were persuaded through the process of consultation that there was not enough support for it to succeed and that other processes in play might have been affected if the Council had acted at that time. However, the situation has deteriorated further and the threat to a two-State solution has become greater. Over the coming weeks, therefore, New Zealand will resume the conversation about the sequencing and content of a focused draft resolution as the views of the French representatives and the Quartet take greater shape. The efforts of those parties are vital, but they are not sufficient, and they cannot absolve the Council of its responsibility to lead. It is our absolute conviction that a Council resolution is an essential ingredient in the steps that lie ahead. The only issue is its timing and relationship to external processes. New Zealand would find it hard to understand how a draft text with the limited purpose and focus I have outlined could be too strong to be acceptable to other Council members.

Conversely, some others may be underwhelmed and want a more wide-ranging resolution. However, based on the careful soundings we have taken, our conclusion is that, in the current dire circumstances, maximalist positions would almost certainly fail and would serve only to consign the Council to continuing to preside in silence over the demise of the two-State solution. Our immediate task must be to preserve that ultimate goal and put the Council's weight behind the first steps on the path. I know that there are those who would rather the Council played no role and others who will assert that there are risks around a resolution at this time. But the greater risk by far is that the Council might do nothing at all as a two-State solution is pronounced dead and buried. New Zealand is therefore committed to seeing the Council decide on a clear plan over the coming weeks.

Between the work of the Quartet, the Arab League, the French initiative and others, there is a vitally important role for the Security Council. We will work with others to determine whether a draft resolution can best support the work of the Quartet, the French and the Arab ministers by being finalized before or after the other initiatives that are under way. However, whether

a Council initiative is concluded imminently or a little later in the year, we believe it will be useful to start discussions as soon as possible on a draft text and on synchronizing the Council's consideration with other parties and external initiatives.

We hope that by the time of the next Middle East debate in the Council, there will be greater clarity and unity about a way forward.

Mr. Danon (Israel): If I may, we just heard about a terror attack in Jerusalem in which a bus exploded and dozens of people are being evacuated. We expect to hear condemnation of that during today's discussion.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): Today we are holding a very solemn meeting of the Security Council, and I therefore urge everyone to abide by all the Council's provisional rules of procedure and keep order in the Chamber so as to reflect the seriousness of the question we are discussing. I expect all members present to observe that.

Mr. Pressman (United States of America): I would like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his briefing.

The commitment of the United States to peace in the Middle East and to advancing the vision of two States, living by side by side in peace, is unwavering. Many are rightly frustrated with the lack of progress, and we are too. We will continue to be steadfast in our support of efforts that will advance dialogue, peace and progress, and to oppose those that do not. Progress will be born out of hard choices made by both leaders with the aim of advancing the cause of peace over parochial politics. As such, we remain very concerned about the recent wave of terrorism and violence and about the utter lack of progress the parties have made towards a two-State solution. It is important that both sides demonstrate, through concrete policies and action, a genuine commitment to achieving a two-State solution in order to reduce tensions and restore hope in the possibility of peace.

What we have seen on the ground, and what people such as the Meir family present here today have experienced first-hand, is absolutely unconscionable. The recent spate of violence that has been going on for more than six months has included stabbings, shootings and vehicular attacks, including, as the Israeli Ambassador just noted, reports of a bus exploding in Jerusalem. Acts of terrorism have taken too many lives, including those of Americans. The victims have included soldiers and civilians, pregnant women and mothers, Israelis and Palestinians. That must come to an end. Let us be clear and unequivocal. There is no justification or rationalization for terrorism. Terrorism is terrorism. It is wrong, it is bloody and it must stop. Anyone who aspires to achieve a viable and independent Palestinian State must understand that engaging in incitement to violence serves only to undermine that goal. Only a political outcome, without violence, will enable that goal to be realized.

The United States continues to call on the Palestinian leadership, publicly and privately, to do everything possible to combat all forms of incitement and to explicitly condemn terrorist attacks. All perpetrators of violence should be brought to justice, and justice should be blind, fair and equal. We remain deeply concerned about the shooting on 24 March in Hebron of a Palestinian assailant by a member of the Israeli security forces, and we are closely following the legal proceedings against the accused perpetrator. We note that just today charges of manslaughter were brought against the soldier. It is critical that every possible effort be made to show restraint, guard against the unnecessary loss of life and de-escalate tensions. In cases where anyone from either side acts outside of the law, they must be held accountable.

As we have stated repeatedly, the United States strongly opposes settlement activity. It is incompatible with, and calls into question the Israeli Government's commitment to, two States. That is why we are deeply troubled that, since 1 January, there have been a number of Israeli declarations of State land in the West Bank, including expropriating approximately 600 acres south of Jericho and 250 acres south of Bethlehem. Just last week, the Government of Israel advanced the construction of hundreds of housing units in West Bank settlements in various stages of the planning process. Many of those units are located beyond the separation barrier deep within the West Bank. Those actions — the process of land expropriations, settlement expansions and the legalization of outposts — are wrong and fundamentally undermine the prospects for a two-State solution. Similarly, we are deeply troubled by the demolitions and evictions undertaken by the Israeli authorities in several locations throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem. As we have repeatedly made clear, we continue to look to both sides to demonstrate

with actions and policies a genuine commitment to a two-State solution.

Nowhere are Palestinians suffering more than in Gaza, where the slow pace of reconstruction remains concerning. The stranglehold that Hamas wields over the population in Gaza forces the pace of reconstruction to stall further, as the taxes it levies and its diversion of construction materials leave Palestinians in Gaza with much less than they would otherwise have to rebuild their homes, communities and infrastructure. It was announced just today that the Israeli military discovered a tunnel extending into Israeli territory from Gaza 10 days ago. We all have an obligation to ensure that reconstruction materials are used for their intended purpose. We remain deeply concerned by the humanitarian conditions in Gaza. The United States provided an initial contribution of $43.4 million to the $403 million emergency appeal of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, for its operations in the West Bank and Gaza, and we thank those in the Council and within the international community who have made contributions. But far too few have stepped up with resources. We ask others to join the United States in meeting those vast needs. We note that the Government of Israel has expanded the Palestinian fishing zone off of Gaza's coast from six to nine nautical miles, which we hope will somewhat improve the livelihoods of Palestinian fishermen in Gaza.

Turning briefly to the political process, as the Quartet principals jointly stated in Munich in February, the status quo is unsustainable, and significant steps are urgently needed to stabilize the situation and reverse negative trends on the ground. Both sides must demonstrate through policies and actions a genuine commitment to a two-State solution in order to rebuild trust and avoid a cycle of escalation. We believe that the Quartet's upcoming report will help to inform international discussions on the best way to advance a two-State solution.

Turning now to the ongoing horrific situation in Syria, we welcome the third round of intra-Syrian talks, which resumed in Geneva last week, and thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his efforts. As resolution 2254 (2015) states, the only sustainable solution to the current crisis in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, including through the establishment of an inclusive transitional governing body with full executive powers, which shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent while ensuring continuity of governmental institutions.

That is the heart of the effort undertaken by the International Syria Support Group and the process that Special Envoy De Mistura aims to move forward in Geneva. We are acutely aware that the Geneva talks and the situation on the ground in Syria are deeply interwoven. Success or failure in one area intimately affects the others. The stakes are enormous. And certainly with regard to both the cessation of hostilities and improving humanitarian access, more can and must be done. The cessation of hostilities is holding in parts of the country and has improved the day-to-day reality of numerous Syrians' lives in those areas, but violations continue. We remain particularly disturbed by the regime's ongoing attacks on parties to the cessation of hostilities. Those violations not only harm and kill Syrian civilians, but also place great strain on other parties to the cessation of hostilities, many of whom have made great efforts to show restraint. The regime's behaviour will only strengthen the position of groups like Jabhat Al-Nusra that consistently try to undermine the cessation of hostilities. We continue to press the opposition to resist being drawn into violence as a result of Jabhat Al-Nusra and regime actions. We have urged the opposition to maintain compliance with the cessation of hostilities. There must be a halt in the escalating violence in Aleppo and in other areas, including Latakia, Hama and the suburbs of Damascus, where recent events pose a serious threat to the durability of the agreement.

To understand the human dimensions of violations to the cessation of hostilities, I want to say just a word about Dr. Hassan Al-Araj, a respected cardiologist in the norther part of Hama, who was killed in an air strike last week. As of today, there are very few doctors left in Hama, and there are no cardiologists. Hearts that need care will have no one.

Once again, the Syrian regime needs to end the killing and the violence, and it needs to do much more with regard to humanitarian access in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Of the 4.1 million Syrians in hard-to-reach locations, the United Nations has been permitted to reach just 249,000 this year — 249,000 out of 4.1 million, or little more than 6 per cent of those in hard-to-reach areas. The main reason for that is clear: the deliberate obstruction by the Syrian regime, including disputing the United Nations population figures as a

new mechanism to prohibit aid from reaching starving populations. The regime deployed that new strategy in the Damascus suburbs of Arbeen, Zamalka and Zabadin, as all three regions had been approved for assistance delivery but were stalled as the United Nations had to renegotiate with the Syrian regime exactly how many people were in need of assistance. Instead of feeding people, the United Nations is forced to negotiate and renegotiate exactly how many starving people will be fed. For those trapped within the besieged areas, where people are intentionally starved and maliciously denied access to international assistance, of the 486,000 people in 18 besieged locations the United Nations has been allowed to reach only 12 locales and 152,500 people. We must do better, and we must do so quickly because people are literally starving to death.

As such, we commend the United Nations efforts in the recent successful airlift of food supplies for the approximately 4,000 residents in Deir ez-Zor besieged by Da'esh, while noting the remaining challenge to address the needs of all 200,000 in the city. We also hope that the recent United Nations trip to Darayya will lead to the immediate delivery of assistance to its people, who have not received one crumb of aid since 2012. The world is witnessing an intentional massive starvation campaign in real time. All actors, including the regime, need to allow food to reach people who are literally dying for it.

We once again call on the Syrian regime to comply with international law, including resolution 2254 (2015) and the demands of the international community, to allow assistance to reach all Syrians in need. The next steps in Syria are as urgent as they are clear. There must be a permanent cessation of hostilities, full humanitarian access and an end to the violence, and all Member States must support the political transition in Syria.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and for his commitment.

The Oslo Accords, signed in 1994, at a time of great hope, made the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel the key to the resolution of that historic conflict. Nevertheless, let us be frank. More than 20 years after those agreements, the creation of a Palestinian State has never been as remote. The daily progression of Israeli settlement activity, which parcels up Palestinian territory so as to reduce it to a small portion, calls into question the viability of a future State.

Violence structures relations between Israelis and Palestinians, whether in acts of terrorism, individual attacks or simply the weight of occupation. The wave of violence with increasing intensity that has persisted for six months has led to hundreds of deaths and thousands of wounded. The rift between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples is unprecedented. It fuels the radicalization of public opinion; people seem to no longer believe in the possibility of the peaceful coexistence of two States. That is one of the most worrisome aspects. We must make no mistake against that backdrop. The status quo is an illusion; the status quo is mechanically a regression, that daily takes us farther and farther away from the possibility of one day seeing a two-State solution emerge. We must look squarely at the harsh reality on the ground. If nothing is done, the tenuous prospects for a two-State solution will disappear and the risk of generalized violence will once again be reinforced.

Given that undeniable observation, France's message for several months now can be summarized in a single sentence: there is crucial need to create a credible political horizon to save the two-State solution, as that solution is the only one that responds to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians for a State and Israel for security.

As demonstrated by the ongoing implacable nature of the conflict, we know there can be no easy solutions. However, the choice of not dealing with the matter, or searching for ways to act to manage or contain the conflict, is not that of my country. France believes that we must all undertake our responsibility to act and, when the time is right, to do so through the Security Council. Given the scope of the challenge, we think that collective mobilization of the international community is today the only way to move forward. Under the leadership of President of the Republic and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, France has decided to launch an initiative to provide a credible political horizon for the peace process. It is a cooperative, inclusive and progressive approach.

First, it is cooperative. To that end, the Special Envoy of France, Ambassador Pierre Vimont, conducted broad, in-depth consultations with the parties and the international and regional stakeholders to formulate proposals. The approach, then, was inclusive, as I noted. The initiative is complementary to the actions

conducted by the Quartet, the United Nations and the United States. Given the difficult task before us, we will indeed need the commitment of all stakeholders if we hope to succeed. Finally, the initiative is progressive. Given the rift between the parties, it would be illusory to think there would be an immediate resumption of negotiations. Our goal is therefore based on the priority of halting the negative spiral and taking the necessary decisions so as to safeguard the two-State solution, to recreate on that basis a positive political dynamic.

As was announced by the President of the Republic in Cairo, France itself proposes to organize in Paris in early June a ministerial meeting, notably by gathering the members of the Quartet, the permanent members of the Security Council and the Arab League, as well as other regional and European stakeholders. The meeting would have three objectives.

First, as I mentioned, it would be to reaffirm the support of the international community to the two-State solution and the major principles of conflict resolution. We will be guided by the Quartet's report, which will provide one of the foundations of our actions.

Secondly, an objective would be to focus on garnering specific commitments by the international community. To implement those ends, we will establish working groups so as to produce a comprehensive package of incentives that could decidedly engender a special European partnership, the reaffirmation of the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as economic and security guarantees.

Thirdly, the objective would be to define a timetable with specific goals as well as the methodology for an international conference, which we would like to convene in the fall. The objective of the conference would be to provide a foundation for relaunching the process of credible negotiations within an internationally agreed upon framework.

Since resolution 181 (II), adopted by the General Assembly in 1947, the two-State solution has been the shared guideline for the Organization. France is aware of the difficulty of the challenge; it is a conflict where so much goodwill has failed. We, however, believe that is our collective responsibility not to give up. We must never give up. Our ambition is not claiming that we alone are able succeed where others have failed. No, France's idea is to be a link and to make available our experience and relationships with the parties in the region so as to energize the emergence of a consensual approach. That method is demanding, but at the same time we believe it is the best way to make solid progress and to create the conditions conducive to forging credible negotiations.

With regard to the situation in Syria, France welcomed the resumption of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva on 13 April under the aegis of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. Mr. Staffan de Mistura enjoys our full support in his ongoing mediation efforts. We also welcome the constructive approach of the opposition, which is engaged in the Geneva negotiations despite provocations from the regime.

We welcome the stated objective of the resumption of talks concerning the decisive question, among others, of the political transition and negotiations with the regime. The high negotiating committee should lead to the terms of a compromise for the implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2013/522, annex), in particular a transition authority within the next six months, paving the way for the drafting of a new Constitution by the Syrian people and the holding of elections in free and fair conditions within 18 months. Half measures or unilateral arrangements, which the regime might announce, following fake elections would have no value, as they would not be the outcome of an agreement with the opposition, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015).

We deplore the worsening situation in the Syrian territory in recent weeks with the observed increase in attacks by the regime. Those practices demonstrate that the regime continues those atrocities and violates the cessation of hostilities, thereby seeking to undermine the efforts of the international community for a political solution. Without a political solution, we know there can be no sustainable peace in Syria.

Finally, hand in hand with the cessation of hostilities, France believes that the full, safe and unhindered access, without any preconditions, to humanitarian assistance to those in the population impacted is a top priority. The Syrian regime and Da'esh bear significant responsibility in the matter. Again, strengthened and effective pressure should be exerted on the regime. Those actions of the Syrian regime that undermine the Geneva negotiations must cease.

Allow me say a few words about Yemen, to express our hope that the delegations will soon meet around the negotiations table for the resumption of talks scheduled to resume today, Monday, 18 April. The resumption of negotiations could give rise to genuine

hope. We hope that the Security Council can rapidly send a clear message to the parties to support this new dynamic and to provide full support to the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. The hope for the future of Yemen needs especially to be encouraged and supported, given the fact that the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. Furthermore, the terrorist threat in Yemen is increasing every day. The Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula group and Da'esh are taking advantage of the instability to spread their influence across the country. A good-faith commitment on the part of the parties to the conflict to a political settlement in Yemen and a clear commitment by the Security Council are therefore all the more urgent.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Sometimes we hear that, given the numerous other crises, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has lost its significance in the context of efforts to maintain international peace and security. We categorically disagree with that point of view. Efforts aimed at solving the Palestinian-Israeli issue should be bolstered. We believe that the primary task today is to create conditions conducive to the revival of the negotiations.

The situation on the ground remains tense and fraught with new spates of violence. Since October 2015, there have been more than 200 Palestinian victims and more than 30 Israeli victims of the confrontations. Against that worrisome backdrop, the Israeli Government has continued its policy of faits accomplis, building settlements, confiscating land, demolishing Palestinian homes and jeopardizing the two-State solution.

In that context, it is more important than ever that the international community send a clear message to prevent the unleashing of new spirals of violence and to underscore the need for a swift resumption of the negotiations. The leading role in guiding the situation back to the political-diplomatic front should be played by the international mediators of the Middle East Quartet.

The ministerial meetings of the Quartet held in Vienna in October 2015 and in Munich in February 2016, which were convened upon Russia's initiative, were aimed at bringing the parties back to constructive actions so as to normalize the situation and make progress in the achievement of sustainable and mutually acceptable agreements based on well-known international law. We hope that the upcoming report of the Quartet will provide an objective analysis of the situation on the ground and recommendations to the parties. We also hope that it will help to defuse tensions and provide a political horizon for a settlement.

Neither can we forget about Gaza. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip remains exceedingly difficult, and at any time it could slide into another dangerous crisis. If progress cannot be achieved in resolving the problems in the Gaza Strip, overcoming the embargo and rebuilding the infrastructure destroyed by Israel in the summer of 2014, repeat clashes cannot be ruled out.

The issue of achieving Palestinian unity is particularly important in reviving the peace process. We welcome the meetings among representatives of Fatah and Hamas held in Doha and Cairo in February and March to discuss the formation of a Government of national unity and the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections. Despite the difficulties in the negotiations between Fatah and Hamas, we continue to lend our assistance in overcoming the inter-Palestinian split.

We appreciate the efforts of all members of the international community aimed at achieving a comprehensive, fair and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. However, such steps and initiatives must be clearly calibrated and aimed at specific results. The primary criterion for assessing the usefulness of such efforts to restart the negotiations is a clear understanding of their added value.

We share the deep discomfort of most members of the Security Council with regard to the Council's inaction in our efforts to settle the crisis between Israel and Palestine. Indeed, the most recent Security Council document on that issue was presidential statement S/PRST/2009/14, adopted upon Russia's initiative in 2009. In 2011, there was a veto by the United States on the draft resolution contained in document S/2011/24, on the issue of settlements, and, in 2014, there was an abstention — or hidden veto — on the draft resolution contained in document S/2014/916. On the latter occasion, there were two votes against and five abstentions, but essentially what happened was that everything was done to block the draft resolution and to not allow the Security Council's view on that topic to be heard. In each of those cases, the Russian Federation voted in favour. Of course, that is not a very impressive result in the Council's work. The Council must do more, including to implement Russia's initiative on the

organization of a Security Council visit to the Middle East.

With regard to Syria, we believe it is necessary to use the cessation of hostilities in the country and the inter-Syrian dialogue in Geneva under United Nations auspices to reach a lasting political settlement. In that context, we are pleased with the launching of a second round of talks, mediated by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura. We will continue to provide assistance to the Syrian armed forces in countering international armed terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front. We attach great importance to the activities of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) task forces on the ceasefire and humanitarian access.

We believe the statement delivered today on this matter by the representative of the United States was unbalanced, unobjective and counterproductive.

We believe that success can be achieved through an ongoing and productive inter-Syrian dialogue, in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/522, annex), the decisions of the ISSG and resolution 2254 (2015). All sectors of Syrian society who have not dirtied their hands with terrorist activities, including Kurds, should participate in the dialogue. We once again underscore the need for the delegation of the opposition in Geneva to be truly representative and not to base its participation in the negotiations on preconditions. We believe that there should be a comprehensive, objective and de-politicized approach to humanitarian issues. That is the only way they can be solved in an effective and lasting manner.

We call for the establishment of a comprehensive ceasefire in Yemen among all the parties to the conflict. We think that the new round of negotiations should begin without unjustified delays. We consider it important to ensure unhindered humanitarian access and to lift embargoes of any type. The swift normalization of the situation with regard to entry points for commercial cargo, first and foremost carrying food, water and medicine, will significantly alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people.

The situation in Libya remains complex and uncertain. Efforts to restore unity, based on the Skhirat political agreement, are moving too slowly. That is no surprise, recalling that foreign intervention clearly dealt a hard blow to Libya's statehood. Meanwhile, terrorists are expanding into strategically important regions of the country, and the socioeconomic and humanitarian problems are becoming worse. Nonetheless, the solution can only be Libyan-led. That requires the continuation of the patient work carried out under the auspices of the United Nations to garner the participation in the dialogue of all influential forces from all regions of the country. That is why we were puzzled by the recent decision of the European Union to include on its sanctions list some key participants in the political process. That approach could further entrench inter-Libyan antagonisms.

In order to effectively assist Libyans, including in countering the burgeoning threat of terrorism, there is a need for due coordination of initiatives with the full participation of regional players. However, some information suggests that certain international partners might have a hidden agenda in Libya. There is a need to help, but only within the framework of international law, so that in the years to come we do not have to regret the mistakes made.

The difficult situation in the Middle East and North Africa, political and military turbulence, deep social and economic strains, as well as the widening sphere of influence of terrorist groups and worsening standards of living for the masses, require calibrated collective work to be carried out in order to stabilize the region. The Security Council should play the most important role in those efforts.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the briefing by the Secretary-General on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Our delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Middle East continues to be affected by a complex political reality — the product of war, foreign interference and terrorism — all of which are the direct result of military interventionism and the lack of a political agreement to resolve the region's conflicts. The deadlock in the peace process between Israel and Palestine represents the primary obstacle to the stability of the region. For that reason, we will focus our remarks on that issue.

In the complex scenario of the region, the solution of the issue of Israel's occupation of Palestine remains deadlocked in terms of the political process, while at the same time the occupying Power is deepening its colonization of Palestinian land. Such actions continue apace in the light of the apathy of the Security Council, which is making no effort to demand that Israel cease its acts of violence against the Palestinian population and end its illegal expansionist and settlement policies on Palestinian land. There can be no doubt that this inactivity on the part of the Council is fuelling the impunity with which Israel acts, as it continues to commit a whole range of acts of aggression against Palestinian men, women and children.

We would like to highlight some of the major serious obstacles to the two-State solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. The prolonged Israeli occupation has been exploited to consolidate the settlement policy on Palestinian territory. By way of illustration, look no further than the support of the Israeli Government for the settlers, which increased in 2015 compared with the figures for previous years. It is noteworthy that during the first three months of 2016, settlement construction increased 250 per cent compared with the same period of the previous year. All of this is reflected in the expansion of the illegal occupation of the territory: today there are more than 650,000 settlers living in more than 260 settlements in the West Bank, including neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem. To this we would add the seizure of Palestinian land, which is carried out by the simple proclamation by the Israeli authorities declaring such land State land or State property.

In addition to the settlement policy, let me stress that the Israelis are continuing to demolish houses, in some cases on the baseless excuse of the lack of a building permit by the Palestinians. In other instances, the Israelis use the pretext of applying collective punishment to Palestinian families for crimes alleged to have been committed by certain members of those families.

As a result of these abusive practices, between January and April 2016 the Israeli authorities demolished 586 houses or structures of other kinds in vulnerable communities in the region, particularly in the area known as Area C. Their actions left more than 700 individuals homeless. The occupying Power does not seem to care that many of the buildings destroyed were constructed thanks to international support and seems indifferent to the fact that many demolitions are carried out in areas where Palestinian families live in poverty, and that being left homeless means that they have no choice but to swell the ranks of refugees. Israeli settlements are illegal, and the Security Council should be able to muster the political unity necessary to condemn them, as the entire international community hopes to see it do.

The situation of violence in the country is also extremely sad, and it is sad to hear the victims' personal stories of violence. But we have to make sure to put the situation in the proper context. We could fill this Chamber with the victims of violence in Palestine. We could fill the General Assembly Hall. This is just to try to give the Council an idea of what is happening in Palestine and of its scale and magnitude.

The origin of all this suffering is the illegal occupation by Israel. The situation of violence in the occupied territories is worrisome owing to the ongoing criminal actions of the occupying Power against the inhabitants of Palestine, under the pretext of the need to increase security to respond to the acts committed by Palestinians targeting Israelis. Our country unequivocally condemns such acts. However, because we understand that the root cause of the violence is the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and given the differences in strength between Israel and Palestine, we denounce with even greater vigour the disproportionate response, including administrative detention, collective punishment and extrajudicial executions, of the occupying Power against the Palestinian population.

In a similar vein, we denounce administrative detentions, which violate human rights and which have been increasing to include even minors. Reports indicate that 78 per cent of the Palestinians held in Israeli detention facilities, that is, almost 5,400 individuals, including 264 minors, are considered to be prisoners for security reasons and thus suffer conditions that are harsher than those of the prison population in general.

Arbitrary arrests of Palestinians by Israel are often linked to torture and abuse by the occupying Power. A recently published report indicates that of the 149 Palestinians murdered by the Israeli Defence Forces in 2015, 77 were killed during incidents related to attacks against Israel, whereas the other 72 died as the result of disproportionate action and aggression by the occupying Power at checkpoints, while it was cracking down on protests or carrying out routine operations. In many of these cases, the victims did not pose any threat

whatsoever to the security or the well-being of the repressive authorities. We urge that all those involved in such crimes targeting innocent and defenceless citizens stand trial and hope that the day will come when impunity ends and Israel will be held accountable.

Faced with this pattern of systemic violence targeting the Palestinians, we urge the Council to take account of the call to establish an international protection system for the Palestinian population in the occupied territories, in line with the Fourth Geneva Convention and resolution 904 (1994). In that framework, and as we have previously suggested in this body, we could consider contemplating a presence by the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations system that are already deployed in Palestine. Within the limits of their specific competencies, they could play a protection-of-civilians role.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to be delicate, as a result of the blockade and siege to which the population has been subjected since 2007. This latter step exacerbates the military aggression perpetrated by Israel during Operation Defensive Shield in 2014, which took the lives of 2,251 Palestinians, including 1,462 civilians and 551 children.

International efforts for the reconstruction of Gaza have been hampered by lack of cooperation on the part of Israel and the continued blockade. The repair and rebuilding of houses, schools, hospitals and service infrastructures are seriously undermined by Israeli restrictions on the entry and exit of goods and materials to and from Gaza, as well as the threat of fresh attacks and destruction by Israel. Israel must lift the inhumane blockade to which it is subjecting the people of Palestine and Gaza, which is a clear violation of international humanitarian law.

We believe that the Palestinian question is one of the most egregious failures of the Security Council. The Council has deceived the millions of Palestinians who, for more than 60 years, have trusted it to take action as the guarantor of international peace and security in the quest for a solution to the conflict. Nonetheless, the occupation and the settlement process in the Palestinian territory not only persists but continues to expand, taking many lives and causing unremitting violence in the region.

Palestine is the victim of one of the most serious tragedies and injustices in modern history. Certain members of the Council are directly responsible for the inaction of this body in the face of this tragedy. We are wondering how long the Palestinian people must wait. Why does the Security Council sit by silently and allow the mass violation of human rights and international humanitarian law by Israel? Why does the Security Council maintain double standards on this matter? How many more Palestinian children must die before the Council reacts?

This issue can be resolved only on the political track, and we therefore welcome all of the efforts currently under way on various fronts to breathe new life into the peace process, which has been moribund for more than 20 years now. We will consider in good faith and in a constructive spirit any initiative that would allow us to make headway in negotiations conducive to rekindling peace negotiations on an equal footing between Palestinians and Israelis and based on a political, negotiated and inclusive solution that would bring a definitive end to the conflict in the framework of the two-State solution, with full acceptance of the right of the Palestinian people to live within internationally recognized borders, in line with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. All of these represent the key elements in the negotiations. They cannot be changed. We must avoid any action on the ground that could threaten the two-State solution. We believe that all the initiatives, such as that of the Quartet, the Arab League Initiative and the French initiative, must adhere to those principles in order to achieve a positive outcome.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by conveying the condolences of Spain to the Permanent Missions of Japan and Ecuador in the light of the very high number of victims resulting from the earthquakes that struck both countries over the weekend. We would also like to begin this statement by condemning all acts of terrorism wherever they take place.

I will begin by referring to the Palestinian issue, and subsequently will turn to the latest events in Yemen, Syria and in Lebanon. I will try to abide by the five-minute rule.

A few months ago, in October, we held an open debate on the situation in the Middle East (see S/PV.7540) under Spain's presidency of the Security Council. That was at the beginning of the terrible wave of violence, which has continued all this time. In recent

weeks the violence seemed to have attenuated, even if today the news is not that good.

A point that we have made on many occasions is one that we think needs repeating now: setting a political timeline of hope is the only way to put a permanent end to the violence and move towards a solution to the conflict. It is the only way whereby we can ensure the security of Israel on a sustained basis. Setting a timeline that will bring hope in its wake is essential and urgent, because the viability of the two-State solution is at risk.

In last October's open debate, Spain made the point that the international community must be fully involved in the solution to the conflict, and that we could do that through an international conference that would relaunch the peace process and prevent the demise of the two-State solution. We therefore support the efforts currently being made by France to convene an international conference on the peace process. We believe that that needs to be the priority at this juncture, including here in the Security Council.

We also agree with the point that the Security Council has a key role to play in defending the two-State solution. We bear a responsibility for that. But we have to tread very carefully in deciding how we are going to fulfil that responsibility, and make sure that we prioritize a course of action that holds out a genuine possibility of making headway at the present time towards breathing new life into the peace process. Moreover, as I have just indicated, we believe that that means choosing a particular course of action, namely, the holding of an international conference. Such action is fully complementary to the work of the Quartet, particularly to its initiative of drafting a report about the situation on the ground and about the viability of the two-State solution.

We trust that once that report has been submitted, it will serve to provide guidance for the subsequent action on the part of the Security Council to address the issue and find such a solution, one that the entire international community yearns for and that will uphold the two-State solution. The involvement of the international community does not mean in any way that the parties to the conflict cannot be involved. If they truly yearn for peace, they must work to foster the appropriate conditions on the ground for a return to negotiations. They therefore must avoid any action that could imperil the two-State solution.

The construction of settlements in the occupied territories is the most blatant example of such an action. It is illegal under international law and constitutes one of the main threats to the feasibility of the two-State solution going forward. The Security Council has repeatedly spoken of the illegal nature of the settlements. It is a point that we have expressed loud and clear on various occasions, including in resolutions 446 (1979) and 465 (1980).

Secondly, Israel must put an immediate halt to the demolitions, the forced evictions of people and the seizure of land. Israel must also adopt transformative measures to rebuild the necessary climate of trust in order to preserve the two-State solution.

Thirdly, irrespective of all that I have just said on those points, I think it is also worth underscoring once again our robust and unequivocal rejection of violence, echoing a point that I made at the beginning of this statement: such violence can never be justified. In particular, acts of terrorism must be condemned once again by all of us robustly and categorically — such acts constitute terrorism, in any situation, under any circumstances, anywhere. Both parties must refrain from any incitement to violence and must refrain from the disproportionate use of force.

Finally, I think it would be remiss of me not to make the point that intra-Palestinian reconciliation is also key if we are to move forward in the peace process. We hope that the talks held in Doha between Hamas and Fatah will provide an opportunity for both parties to abide by previous agreements, thus ensuring that we can restore the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority over Gaza and set a course for elections.

I will now turn to the matter of Yemen. The parties to the conflict have finally agreed to a ceasefire, which we hope will last and become permanent. That will then mean that we have a window of opportunity to mitigate the terrible humanitarian suffering in that country.

Direct negotiations were scheduled to commence today. However, we have learned that they have been postponed, but we hope that such a delay will not be repeated in the future. We would like to reiterate our support for the efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen in ensuring that the talks go ahead and that they lead to an inclusive solution that will guarantee the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen.

Turning to Syria, seven weeks have now gone by since the cessation of hostilities came into effect. We have just begun the second round of the so-called proximity talks in Geneva. Nonetheless, we are seeing — and we are worried about this — an escalation of clashes, which is threatening to derail resolution 2268 (2016). The lack of progress on the humanitarian track is also an indication of the fragility of the process. For that reason, we urge all the parties to the conflict to immediately halt attacks targeting all those forces that have agreed to the cessation of hostilities agreement. We call for a robust commitment to the negotiation process to lead us towards a political transition in the talks taking place in Geneva. Finally, we call for full respect for international humanitarian law by all parties. In particular, we call on the Government of Syria to urgently review its policy on the provision of medical equipment to the besieged areas.

Finally, with regard to Lebanon, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the information that he has made available to us and his commitment to Lebanon, which was made abundantly clear during his recent trip to that country. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute once again to the people of Lebanon, who have demonstrated an understanding of their responsibility and the need for social solidarity, which serve as an example and a model. They have provided their hospitality to an extraordinary number of refugees.

At the same, I must express our concern about the institutional deadlock that has racked that country for too long now. It is of the utmost importance that the political forces in Lebanon arrive, as quickly as possible, at an agreement that will allow for the election of a new President.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I thank you, Mr. President, for presiding over this open debate.

On behalf of the people and the Government of Malaysia, I would like to take this opportunity to convey our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of victims of the earthquakes that struck Ecuador and Japan over the weekend. We wish godspeed to the recovery and assistance efforts.

Like Spain and Venezuela, we too condemn all acts of violence.

My delegation warmly welcomes the presence of His Excellency Mr. Murray McCully, Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, and His Excelelncy Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, at this meeting.

We thank the Secretary-General for his briefing, which we listened to very carefully. We completely agree with the message conveyed by the Secretary-General and by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand. The current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is not sustainable and requires urgent action by the Council.

Malaysia aligns itself with the statements to be delivered by the representatives of Iran and Kuwait on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Organization of Islamic Conference, respectively.

For the purpose of today's open debate, my delegation wishes to focus solely on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are two main reasons for that. First, of the issues pertaining to the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been on the United Nations agenda for the longest period. It is as old as the United Nations itself. And, whether we wish to admit it or not, the protracted Palestinian question is the nucleus that has triggered various other threats to international peace and security.

Secondly, unlike all other Middle East conflicts, there is no recent Council action on the question of Palestine. The last time a Council resolution was adopted was more than seven years ago, which belies the worsening situation on the ground and the rising threats to the two-State solution. Worst of all, there is simply no political will by the Council to act to bring an end to Israel's illegal occupation and to salvage the two-State solution, in accordance with international law, the values and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international human rights standards. There is also a clear lack of appetite by the Council to use the tools at its disposal on the issue of Palestine, unlike with regard to Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. Therefore, Malaysia is of the view that this issue deserves our undivided attention at this meeting.

Malaysia strongly condemns the extrajudicial killings perpetrated by Israeli forces against Palestinians, including children and women. The cold-blooded murder of a Palestinian youth by an Israeli soldier in Hebron — the youth was shot in the head as he lay injured on the ground — is a clear instance of Israel's shoot-to-kill policy. Tragically, if not for the fact that the incident was captured on video, it would

have been treated as another act of self-defence by the Israeli army, and the perpetrator would have gotten away with murder. Even if the incident is investigated by the Israeli authorities, we remain sceptical as to whether justice will be served, as only 3 per cent of criminal investigations into violence committed by the Israeli forces and settlers have resulted in indictments.

The facts on the ground surrounding the murder proved that it was not an isolated incident. If it had been an isolated incident, the Israeli forces would not have reacted by storming the family home of the person who had filmed the incident in order to harass and intimidate him. Israeli settlers would not have reacted by gathering outside that same house to threaten him. The Israeli medical staff present at the scene would not have remained indifferent to the injured Palestinian, even when he was shot in the head right in front of them. And the Israeli soldier who pulled the trigger would not have received the support of over half of Israelis, as recorded by an opinion poll.

That incident reflects the culmination of a long-standing systematic policy that dehumanizes the Palestinians, one perpetuated by an unconstrained culture of impunity. It is an ideology of violent extremism, sanctioned by the occupying Power and institutionalized in Israeli society and its political, military and judicial institutions. In other words, this is what we sow by our inaction. This is what the Palestinians reap in a tragically horrifying manner.

Another unfortunate consequence of our inaction and the prevailing impunity is the rapid expansion of illegal Israeli settlements. This year, Israel continued with its settlement construction, land confiscations and forced evictions, depriving Palestinians of their property and shelter and rendering hundreds of Palestinians — including children — homeless. As reported by the Israeli non-governmental organization Peace Now, the building of illegal Israeli settlements increased by 250 per cent in the first quarter of this year, as compared to the same period last year. Over the years, Israeli authorities have taken over more than 85 per cent of the total area of the historical land of Palestine.

The construction of the apartheid wall also continues unabated, against the decision of the International Court of Justice in 2004. The latest construction in Bethlehem's Cremisan Valley will severely restrict the access of nearly 60 Palestinian families to their agricultural land and devastate their livelihood. Slowly but surely, the illegal settlement activities and the apartheid wall are undermining and fragmenting the contiguity and territorial integrity of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, and physically threaten the viability of and prospects for the two-State solution.

On the situation in Gaza, as mentioned by the Secretary-General, we are deeply concerned about Israel's latest ban on building materials to reconstruct thousands of damaged and destroyed homes and infrastructure. Two years after Israel's military offensive in Gaza, as many as 75,000 Palestinians remain homeless. The international community must act to end the illegal and inhumane blockade of Gaza, as it constitutes the main obstacle to reconstruction and a form of collective punishment that grossly violates international standards of human rights.

Malaysia reiterates the need for the Council to use all tools at its disposal on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, just as in the case of Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. We must end the impunity with which Israel acts by increasing the price to maintain the status quo in occupied Palestine. The end of apartheid in South Africa did not come about through the international community merely standing by and doing nothing. Instead, the international community chose to take effective action by increasing the political, economic and social costs, thereby opposing discriminatory and unjust policies that violated the international standard of human rights. The situation in occupied Palestine is much worse.

The most burning issues that require our urgent action are the illegal settlements, the blockade of Gaza, and the need for international protection for the occupied Palestinian people, in line with international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. As mentioned in the latest report (A/HRC/31/73) of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, a protective presence for Palestinians is needed against the effects of Israeli policies and practices related to the occupation.

For seven years, the Council debated and produced nothing. For seven years, it bore witness to the many atrocities. For seven years, the Council procrastinated, with disastrous consequences. Meanwhile, during those seven years, more blood has been shed, more walls of

hatred have been built, more hopes have been dashed and society has been dehumanized.

We speak today to clear our conscience — doing nothing is not right. We have no quarrel with Israel, the Jewish State or its right to exist. We never have. Our prayer is for Israel to live up to the commandment to love thy neighbour, and stop the atrocities. However, we are left with no choice but to urge the Council to begin to bear witness to good tidings, to use the tools at its disposal, salvage the two-State solution and bring justice and peace to these troubled lands.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): First of all, we would like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, a deeply destabilized region where conflicts rage and where finding solutions to the conflicts has been a tragic, failed endeavour. We welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, Mr. Murray McCully, and thank him for his thoughtful insights.

We endorse the statement to be made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

As Security Council members and States Members of the United Nations meet once again for this statutory quarterly debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, the overall political climate in the region has shown some signs of progress, however weak or elusive. The deal closed in 2015 with the adoption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme was undeniably a landmark in a region where diplomacy has been unable to score any meaningful success in the last quarter of a century. The glimpse of hope that we now witness in the region, with some apparent progress in the search of political solutions to the conflicts in Syria and Yemen, is, we hope, more than a residual by-product of the agreement reached with Iran and the understanding among great and regional Powers in solving that extremely complex issue.

Political will and determination were instrumental to reaching a solution. It is our view that now great and regional Powers must build on the agreement with Iran and make it a real game-changer. In particular, the regional Powers should set aside their rivalries, stop fuelling conflicts in the region and take into account the wake-up call of terrorism at their very doorstep. We furthermore think that it is incumbent upon world and regional Powers to share responsibility and use their leverage to solve the outstanding conflicts in the Middle East, which are a major source of international friction and human suffering on an unbearable scale and an affront to any moral standards.

The Middle East has been a breeding ground for terrorism. In last week's open debate (see S/PV.7670) on threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts a consensus was reiterated that terrorism and violent extremism are global threats that transcend cultures and geographical boundaries. In order to effectively counter this rising threat, we must base our actions on the shared values embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law and humanitarian law. Unfortunately, these basic principles are violated time and time again, resulting in failure to build a world order based on the rule of law and the peaceful coexistence among nations and peoples.

This state of affairs hampers the capacity to effectively address such drivers of violent extremism as the lack of proactive and just engagement with key communities focusing on conflict prevention and resolving long-standing grievances in conflict situations. One such long-standing conflict, which is an unfortunate example of the international community's shared incapacity to find a just and lasting solution, is the conflict in Palestine.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become a most painful and divisive issue since the prospects of reaching a solution seem to be further and further away. The heavy-handed and discriminatory strategies employed by the Israeli Government have been revealed to be counterproductive by further alienating the two communities and fuelling radical and extremist elements on both sides. We note with concern that the reconciliation talks held recently between Fatah, Hamas and other Palestinian factions reached no consensus on the Palestinian issue. We regret the Palestinian divide, as it hampers the ability of the Palestinians to engage constructively in a search for peace, while the rhetoric of incitement to violence becomes an additional element detrimental to the prospects for peace.

However, the reality is that Israel is the occupying Power, and its tactics continuously undermine the possibility of a two-State solution that meets the international community consensus as the most realistic and appropriate way to find a just and long-lasting solution to the conflict. The unreasonable way that

the Israeli Defence Forces deal with the Palestinians, including arbitrary arrests and detentions, the targeting of civilian social infrastructure, collective punishment action through home demolitions, rendering Palestinian families homeless and destitute and, most damaging of all, the continuing settlement expansion, are clear demonstrations of a systematic unwillingness to facilitate the return to negotiations and the resolution of the conflict based on two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

The report recently issued by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process underscores that the demolition of Palestinian homes and livelihood structures more than doubled in the reporting period, and that the demolitions as of mid-April already exceed the total of the previous year. On numerous occasions, Security Council members have stressed the illegality of settlement activity and expansion while agreeing that they constitute the single most damaging factor to a viable Palestinian State. Despite such judgments, some relevant members of the Security Council, while expressing condemnation of such practices, do not use their leverage upon Israel to stop the settlement expansion, which is in flagrant violation of international standards of human rights and international law.

Since we joined the Security Council in 2015, there have been a number of initiatives, namely, the revitalization of the Middle East Quartet, proposals addressing the issue, including consultations with both sides, the convening of an international support group, the French initiative to hold an international conference to restart talks, considering the option of international protection for the Palestinian people, and pursuing legal, diplomatic and economic means to make it too costly for Israel to continue with its illegal settlement policies. However, none of these proposals were accepted or followed through upon.

This systematic lack of direct and unified action by the international community and by the Security Council deliberately sidelines the issue and has continually diminished prospects for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We call upon the Security Council to uphold international law, fulfil its duties to advance a solution for the conflict and assist the Palestinian people to finally realize the freedom, rights and justice they have been unjustly denied and achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace, security and coexistence.

In conclusion, we will continue insisting on the need for consensus and decisive action on clear and sustained policies for resolving this protracted conflict. The current situation in the Middle East and North Africa makes it imperative that the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, demonstrates unity of purpose and act accordingly. We have the collective responsibility to deploy all efforts to see that policies favouring the resumption of negotiations are applied and that Israelis and Palestinians reach tangible results in agreeing to a two-State settlement, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I would like to join others in thanking the Secretary-General for his briefing. For all the excitement there was last week around the hearings of the candidates for the position of the next Secretary-General, we are pleased to have the current Secretary-General still working very closely with us for many months to come.

Looking back on last week's hearings, it was heartening to hear all nine of the declared candidates committing to achieving a two-State solution, underscoring just how united opinion is on the issue. And yet the violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories continues. The risk of a sudden deterioration is all too possible. The fundamental causes of the violence — incitement and the effects of the occupation — remain. The United Kingdom will continue to strongly condemn all acts of violence and terrorism. Both sides must do all they can to calm the situation. That is particularly important during Passover, since the recent past has shown how quickly clashes at Jerusalem's holy sites can escalate and spread.

There is a way out. We all have to work to advance improvements on the ground and re-establish hope that a two-State solution is still achievable. Without that, continued conflict and suffering are inevitable. First and foremost, progress has to come from the parties themselves. We have heard on many occasions that they remain committed to a two-State solution, but too often that commitment has not been matched by action. Israel must reverse its damaging settlement policy and cease demolitions of Palestinian property. The sharp increase in demolitions this year continues to cause terrible suffering. Together with the ongoing expansion of illegal settlements and annexations of land, the physical viability of a two-State solution is being undermined, as the Secretary-General reminded us today. If the

Israeli Government really is committed to a two-State solution, it must reverse its policy.

The Palestinians must also take the necessary steps to reunite the West Bank and Gaza. The continued split between the two territories seriously damages the chances of peace. Reports of large-scale diversions of reconstruction materials to Hamas are worrying, and today's report of a tunnel dug from Gaza into Israel is extremely concerning. We hope that the suspension of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism will soon be resolved so as to enable the safe entry of much-needed construction material. Both parties must work to improve conditions on the ground and take steps in line with past agreements to bring a two-State solution closer. We will continue to support that process and look forward to contributing to further progress at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Brussels. The continued development of the Palestinian economy and institutions is vital.

While a return to meaningful negotiations appears difficult at present, the international community, including the Security Council, must do what it can to preserve the viability of a two-State solution and get the parties back to a position where political progress is possible. The United Kingdom, as ever, stands ready to support that effort. To that end, we look forward to the Quartet's report and welcome further details of the French initiative. Carefully coordinated international efforts over the coming months could help to build consensus on the key threats to a two-State solution and encourage action to address them and re-establish a genuine political horizon.

I would now like to turn briefly to Syria. We welcomed the briefing last week by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, as well as his resumption of proximity negotiations with the Syrian Government and the opposition's high negotiations committee in Geneva. We hope they can build a basis for face-to-face negotiations following the framework of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015). However, we remain concerned about reports of ongoing violations of the cessation of hostilities. Regime offensives seem intent on encircling Aleppo. Their obstruction of humanitarian aid, especially to Darayya and other areas of rural Damascus, is worsening the suffering, and the failure to agree on mechanisms for the release of arbitrarily detained people is only prolonging horror for a great many individuals, as some of us heard at a powerful event last Thursday. When the Council adopted resolution 2268 (2016), we demanded that the parties fulfil their commitment to the cessation of hostilities, including by accelerating humanitarian delivery and taking confidence-building measures. Such steps were meant to advance a political process. The failure to deliver on those points only undermines that process and erodes the confidence of the Syrian people.

I would like to conclude by calling on those with influence on the parties, and especially on the Syrian Government. We have to leave the regime in no doubt that it must live up to its commitments, show restraint and engage honestly with the political process. Until we see progress on those points, it is right that the Council should receive regular updates from the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy in a public forum. Those who challenge or obstruct peace must be heard by all. There should be no place for them to hide.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's important meeting.

Before addressing today's topic, on behalf of the people and the Government of Japan, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the messages from the Secretary-General and the leaders of many Member States, including a number of my colleagues here in the Council, expressing their sympathy for and solidarity with the people of Japan in the wake of the major earthquakes that struck the Kumamoto region in western Japan. They have taken the lives of more than 40 people and injured more than 1,000, while more than 1,000 are now living anxiously in evacuation centres. Our Self-Defence Forces, police, fire deparments and medical units are working around the clock. We are grateful for the offers of assistance made by many countries and organizations. On 16 April, a major earthquake also struck Ecuador. On behalf of the people and the Government of Japan, I would like to express our solidarity with the people of Ecuador.

In order to save time, I will limit my statement to its salient points and circulate the full text later.

The region of Middle East and North Africa is facing outbreaks of conflict, social unrest and violent extremism. Since January, when Japan became a member of the Security Council, I have listened to many reports on tragic humanitarian situations. We must address the best way for us to contribute concretely to the maintenance of international peace and security in the Middle East and North Africa. In Syria, Yemen

and Libya, we have recently seen glimmers of light and hope for the possibility of bringing a permanent end to the conflicts in each of those countries.

In Syria, the cessation of hostilities that began in late February has created the conditions necessary for facilitating immediate humanitarian access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, an improvement conducive to the political process. The new round of intra-Syrian talks has just begun in Geneva. We greatly appreciate the tireless efforts of Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, and his team. Japan has been giving aid to Syria for providing food, improving living conditions and implementing vocational training. In that regard, I am pleased to announce that Japan has decided to provide additional assistance amounting to $11 million as grant aid for rehabilitating three existing electricity facilities in Syria through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Notes to that effect were exchanged last Friday here in New York between Ms. Sima Bahous, UNDP's Assistant Administrator, and myself. Electric generators provided by Japan to Syria during the 1980s and 1990s through our development fund continue to furnish more than 56 per cent of the entire electricity supply in Syria. I believe that project will help to strengthen the resilience of Syrian society and thereby create conditions enabling the Syrian people to feel like staying in their country.

Turning to Yemen, Japan welcomes the nation-wide cessation of hostilities in place since 10 April. We have, however, received the disappointing news that the scheduled peace talks in Kuwait, facilitated by Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, have not yet begun. We urge all the Yemeni parties to engage in the peace talks as soon as possible.

As Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014), I have always stressed that sanctions are meant to support a political solution. The resumption of direct talks is therefore a long-awaited step forward. Since September 2014, Japan has extended $85 million in grant assistance to Yemen. One of the projects includes assistance to the constitution-drafting process. I believe that, once an agreement is reached through the Yemen peace talks, the spending assistance programme will continue, and the parties will be able to arrive at an early formulation of the constitution.

Despite some encouraging signs in the region of the Middle East and North Africa, almost no positive change has occurred in the Middle East peace process since the previous open debate in January (see S/PV.7610). As peace talks have stalled, desperation and violence have spread. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recalled today, settlement activities, which are illegal under international law, are in direct contradiction with the goal of a two-State solution. We reiterate that no act justifies violence, and we call on leaders to denounce violence without exception. Japan will continue to provide economic assistance to Palestine in the firm belief that a sustainable economy underpins the viability of a two-State solution. We also stand ready to participate in initiatives that can lead to peace between Israel and Palestine, including the one put forth by the Government of France.

I will end my statement by paying tribute to the tireless efforts on the part of Special Envoys and Representatives of the Secretary-General stationed in the region of Middle East and North Africa, and by expressing my hope that, with the strong political will of the international community, we will see more positive developments in that region during the next debate on this agenda item, slated for July, when Japan will have the honour to preside over the Council.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council is meeting today to discuss and hear the diverse positions and opinions on the Palestinian question. I can assure the Council that what we will hear and say will not differ very much from what we have heard and reiterated over the past 10 years.

The indivisible rights of the Palestinian people have been recognized and documented in the Organization, and most notably within its two principal bodies, the General Assembly and the Security Council, as well as in the international conventions that have been deposited with the United Nations. The recognition of those rights by the international community was not intended to remain theoretical or to mitigate the suffering of the Palestinian people simply by expressions of our condemnation of the occupation and its practices. Rather, the goal was, and remains, to take the necessary measures to end the occupation in all of its forms, thereby ensuring international peace and security. That would be in the service humankind's conscience, but we seem to have forgotten the Palestinians and their right to establish an independent State, based on the 4 June 1967 borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The increase in occupation activities within the Palestinian territories — whether through colonization, the appropriation of land, the demolition of homes or the forced exodus across the Green Line, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, is simply the natural consequence of the international community's shortcomings with regard to implementing and defending the right of the Palestinian people to the two-State solution. Allow me to share with everyone very briefly the legal foundations established by the international community and the Security Council for settling the issue in the Middle East.

There are legal bases and resolutions whose implementation we are still waiting for. Some believe that they have been successful in diverting the attention of Arab countries and the international community away from those resolutions. As an example, I will read out paragraphs 5, 6 and 7, respectively, of resolution 465 (1980), which was adopted unanimously and states that the Security Council,

(*spoke in English*)

> "Determines that all measures taken by Israel to change the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure or status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, or any part thereof, have no legal validity and that Israel's policy and practices of settling parts of its population and new immigrants in those territories constitute a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and also constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East;
>
> "Strongly deplores the continuation and persistence of Israel in pursuing those policies and practices and calls upon the Government and people of Israel to rescind those measures, to dismantle the existing settlements and in particular to cease, on an urgent basis, the establishment, construction and planning of settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem;
>
> "Calls upon all States not to provide Israel with any assistance to be used specifically in connexion with settlements in the occupied territories".

(*spoke in Arabic*)

What I have just read out is not an illustration of the position of Egypt alone, or that of the Arab States alone. It is a position that enjoys international status commensurate with the Charter of the United Nations. It is the view of the international community as reiterated by the Security Council in many of its resolutions, albeit one that still needs to be fully implemented. The resolution is very clear with regard to the legality of the occupation, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The Security Council has called upon Israel to dismantle the settlements and has called upon States not to provide aid to Israel in connection with those actions. That reiterated position is in clear support of the Palestinian people regarding their right to protection under the articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Resolution 465 (1980), among others — especially resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) — applies to all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan. Some think that they can exploit the Syrian crisis to divert the attention of the international community away from the right of the Syrian people to recover their territory. Egypt reiterates that Israel is obligated under those resolutions to withdraw from the occupied Syrian territories in the Golan.

Despite those clear rights and the fact that Israel was supposed to initiate reforms and alter the situation, and despite the injustice that the Palestinian people have been suffering and the continued occupation of Arab territories, including the Golan, the Arab States decided to make a goodwill gesture by proposing the historic initiative of 2002, the Arab Peace Initiative. It affirmed Israel's right to exist in complete security in the region and the right of Israel's people to normalize relations with the people of neighbouring States after ending the occupation. We have therefore been surprised by the attitude and indifference of the Israeli Government with regard to the Initiative over the past years. I ask the following question: Does the Government of Israel prefer to continue the occupation and defy international law, to the detriment of this historic opportunity, which is still available and would allow for the normalization of relations with other countries of the region and thereby allow its people to live in lasting peace and security?

We are not asking anyone to share in expressions of sympathy or condemnation, nor are we searching for a temporary painkiller, the effect of which only weakens over time and cures nothing. The pain of the Palestinian

people is becoming increasingly acute. We are asking the Security Council to undertake a genuine review in complete transparency and implement the two-State solution before it is too late. That can be done during this sensitive period by establishing a comparison between the situation that we were supposed to have achieved, had the Security Council resolutions and the Oslo Accords been implemented, and the current situation. We simply wish that the Security Council would respect its obligations with regard to preserving international peace and security and put an end to the Israeli occupation in conformity with international law, which is of timeless nature. We ask members of the Security Council to review their positions. We also ask Israel to review its position and to ensure that it upholds international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The protections offered by such laws must be provided to all individuals without distinction.

Allow me to conclude by referring to what the representative of Israel said in the Council today when he stated that Jordan and Egypt had laid down their arms to wager on peace instead. I would like to share with the Council what the actual context was, namely, that that peace, as chosen by Israel, was not a peace in terms of our laying down our arms; that we did not do. It was a forced peace aimed at restoring stability in the region, but we have still not officially resolved the issue that led to the conflict in the first place, that is, the occupation by Israel of our Arab territories to this day.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay deplores and condemns the terrorist attack carried out just a few minutes ago that targeted a bus in Jerusalem. Uruguay deplores and condemns each and every terrorist attack. Last week, we said that terrorism could truly be labelled as an act of cowardice; that is the only appropriate name for it.

At the outset, I would like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General in particular for his presence and for his briefing to the Security Council, in which he referred to various elements and positions that Uruguay shares. The impasse in the peace process between Israel and Palestine, the events of recent months in Syria, the situation in Yemen, the continuing impact of the activities of terrorist groups in the region and, in particular, the death and suffering of thousands of innocent victims are but some of the challenges that the Middle East continues to face.

On the issue of the Middle East peace process, Uruguay would like to reaffirm its full support for the right of Israel and Palestine to live at peace within secure and recognized borders in a spirit of renewed cooperation, free from any threats or acts that might undermine peace, particularly including acts of terrorism. Uruguay reiterates its full support for a two-State solution, firmly convinced that it is the only option that would allow the coexistence of Israel and Palestine on a peaceful footing.

We stress the need for the international community to increase its efforts to encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table with a view to achieving a peaceful, just, negotiated and lasting solution — one that is in line with international law and takes due account of the interests and needs of all the parties to the conflict. We call upon them to refrain from adopting unilateral decisions, which simply hinder dialogue. In that respect, we believe that, as a result, there can be no continuation of the settlement policy, the settlements being illegal in the West Bank.

Uruguay also robustly condemns the stabbings and other brutal attacks targeting Israeli citizens, as well as the incitement to, and glorification of, those abhorrent acts. We would like to reiterate the importance of international cooperation. Such cooperation is essential for contributing to the economic and social development of the Palestinian people. The strengthening, and the establishment where necessary, of national institutions and basic infrastructure are also essential in order to ensure the viability of the Palestinian State, a State that has pursued the path towards confirmation as a full-fledged sovereign State.

Uruguay would like to highlight the deep bonds of friendship that unite us with both the State of Israel and the Palestinian State. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the willingness of Uruguay to contribute to and support any initiative that could lead to a successful conclusion of the peace process. We have taken note of the statement delivered by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, Mr. Murray McCully, and we would like to convey our willingness to work with him.

With regard to the situation in Syria, we believe that the efforts undertaken to find a political solution to the conflict are crucial. In that context, we would like to reiterate our full support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura,

and his entire team. They have engaged in important work and made significant progress in bringing about face-to-face talks between the two parties, thereby making progress in finding a political solution to the conflict, as provided for in resolution 2254 (2015).

The cessation of hostilities in Syria, in place since 27 February, has allowed us an opportunity to substantially reduce violence, improve humanitarian access and foster a better climate for the negotiations in Geneva. Despite the fragility of the current situation and the fact that there have been some setbacks in recent days, we believe that this is the best course of action that might finally bring an end to the long and bloody war in that country. Faced with the dramatic humanitarian situation in Syria, Uruguay would like to underscore the need to continue efforts to ensure that humanitarian assistance makes its way to those who most need it. We would like to reiterate our appeal to the Syrian Government to grant, without further delay, the necessary permits in order to ensure that humanitarian agencies can continue their shipments and can continue with their vital work.

Uruguay would like to stress the illegality, inacceptability and immorality of using hunger as a tactic of war. Such practices constitute war crimes, and all who commit such crimes should be held accountable. We also denounce all attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel and the seizing of medical provisions from humanitarian convoys. Such actions must come to an end. They are in no way commensurate with the standards of international humanitarian law. My country, together with other members of the Security Council, is working on a draft resolution to address the situation in Syria that we hope will soon be accepted.

With regard to Yemen, Uruguay commends the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to Yemen, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Abmed, and welcomes the recent agreement on the cessation of hostilities in the country. Uruguay has confidence in the negotiations, which were supposed to begin today in order to achieve an exit point for the conflict. Similarly, we would like to emphasize the vulnerability of the Yemeni population at this time. It is alarming that approximately 80 per cent of the population needs some form of humanitarian assistance, which means that it is urgent that we adopt measures to put an end to the suffering of the civilian population.

Finally, turning to the situation in Libya, Uruguay warmly welcomed the news of the arrival in Tripoli of the members of the Presidential Council of the Government of National Accord. We hope that that event will constitute a turning point ushering in a new phase in the history of Libya, a phase in which both the new Government and the international community will focus and pool their efforts on the unity, stability, security and development of the country.

I would like to reiterate Uruguay's conviction that, through diplomacy, dialogue and strict adherence to international law, we can lay the foundations that will allow us to deliver lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes the Chinese presidency's initiative to convene this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The Secretary-General reported on the political and security situation in the region in his briefing, and I would like to thank him for that. The situation justifies the Security Council's regular discussion of it.

At the outset, may I, on behalf of my Government and the people of Senegal, express my condolences and solidarity with the people of Japan and Ecuador, hard hit during the recent earthquakes.

With regard to terrorism, I would like to recall that Senegal condemns all violence, regardless of where it comes from.

Our meeting this morning comes once again at a time characterized by continued settlement activity, an exacerbation of violence and an absence of a political horizon in the occupied territories of Palestine. The stalemate in the political process is undoubtedly the basis for the spike in violence on both sides, with a large number of casualties, especially on the Palestinian side. Since October 2015, the escalating violence has led to the death of over 200 Palestinians, including 48 children, and 30 Israelis, not to mention the thousands of wounded. It bears repeating that the systematic and disproportionate use of force is not a solution to the crisis, especially in the absence of a political horizon.

We must deplore the incitement to violence and hatred that certain Palestinian factions engage in. We must also condemn the unacceptable acts of terrorism committed by Israeli settlers in the West Bank, including in Jerusalem. Those acts are likely to aggravate the already deep divisions between the two peoples and

to undermine the prospects for reconciliation and sustainable peace.

The punitive policies carried out by the occupying Power in the Palestinian territories are also a source of concern. Since the beginning of this year, hundreds of Palestinian homes and structures, some built with the help of international partners, have been destroyed, and the number of demolitions this year far exceeds that of 2015.

Similarly, the unacceptable policy involving the geographical, demographic and cultural modification of Jerusalem risks turning the political crisis into a religious conflict with serious consequences for the whole region and beyond. In addition to constituting violations of international law, the increasing settlement activities challenge the two-State solution, to which the Israeli State has nonetheless reiterated its commitment.

One cannot ignore the worrisome situation of the Palestinian economy, in particular in Gaza. In addition to being an unacceptable humanitarian disaster, the blockade against the Gaza Strip is a potential threat to Israel's security, in that it increases the already real risk of having the Palestinian cause coopted or used by other actors, such as the Islamic State, with all the negative consequences that that may bring about. In that respect, we call upon the Israeli Government to take the necessary measures, particularly in the economic field, to alleviate the suffering of the affected populations.

Palestine has a school enrolment rate of approximately 99 per cent, one of the highest rates in the world, and gender balance is deeply rooted in the education system, thanks to the commendable efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). However, with an unemployment rate of over 40 per cent among graduates, it is easy to understand the sense of desperation that drives people, especially young people. In addition, the impact of the Syrian crisis on Palestinian refugees, especially children, is worrying. It should be recalled that 42 per cent of the 118 schools run by UNRWA in Syria, which were attended by 67,300 students, have been forced to close. In total, no fewer than 460,000 Palestinians have directly suffered the consequences of the war in Syria.

In awaiting the recent efforts of the Quartet, including the forthcoming issuance of the report on the status quo, based on a decision taken at the high-level meeting in Munich on 12 February with a view to overcoming the current impasse, my country remains willing to consider any initiative that would lead to a resumption of the negotiations, including that of France to organize an international conference on the Palestinian issue.

For its part, Senegal calls for the resumption of negotiations between Israel and Palestine on the basis of clear elements, with a specific time frame for reaching a final solution based on international law and the relevant resolutions. The time has come for a Palestinian State to be established within secure and internationally recognized borders, in accordance with the United Nations partition plan of 1948. A solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of two States, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, would clearly lead to better management of the security and socioeconomic challenges in the Middle East. In the meantime, the Council should plan for precautionary measures to enforce the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem, without forgetting the solution of the international protectorate for the Palestinian people. The practical elements identified by the Secretariat, based on historic precedent, at the request of the State of Palestine, seem absolutely worthwhile, pending a lasting solution to the crisis, which we eagerly await.

In concluding, I must renew our appeal to the Palestinian political actors to join the Cairo agreement, committing in good faith to the Doha negotiations so as to work towards the formation a Government of national unity, which would facilitate the revival of a political process with Israel.

The conference on the issue of Jerusalem, which is to be convened on 3 and 4 May in Dakar on the initiative of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in cooperation with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, will provide an opportunity, I hope, to contribute to the development of practical solutions to the issues facing that city, which is a symbol of the three monotheistic religions. I take this opportunity to renew our invitation to all States Members of the Organization to actively participate in the meeting.

With regard to the situation in Syria, my delegation appeals to the parties to the conflict to continue, with the support of influential stakeholders, including countries in the region and the International Syria Support Group, to uphold the cessation of hostilities, pursuant to resolution 2268 (2016), which was itself the

result of the joint efforts of the task force on the truce in Syria, which we commend.

In that regard, I wish to reiterate to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, our full support for his efforts to restore lasting peace in Syria, where the conflict has already led to the death of more than 260,000 people and generated 4.6 million refugees and 13.5 million displaced persons.

Finally, with regard to Yemen, we reaffirm Senegal's support for the initiatives of the Special Adviser on Yemen aimed at promoting a credible political process and lasting peace in the country. We appeal to the parties to uphold the ceasefire in order to facilitate the discussions in Kuwait.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I wish to thank the Chinese presidency for convening this open debate. We fully agree with the importance of a regular review of the situation in the Middle East by the Security Council.

I also would like to express our solidarity with Ecuador and Japan, which suffered major earthquakes over the past two days.

Ukraine consistently supports the Middle East peace process and the principle of a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine coexisting in peace and security. In that regard, we are deeply concerned about the latest wave of attacks and widespread violence that has been seen since September 2015 and has resulted in numerous casualties. The rising death toll among civilians cannot, and should not, be tolerated; it serves as irrefutable proof that the status quo is just not sustainable. Another terrible reminder of that is the recent attack against the Israeli bus in Jerusalem, which we condemn in the strongest terms. It is obvious that absolutely no terrorist act can be justified. Yet we strongly believe that all sides must demonstrate genuine restraint and to refrain from the disproportionate use of force, which can only stir up violence and lead to increased casualties. All of that plays into the hands of extremists, who are trying to undermine the fragile prospects for peace.

We are convinced that the establishment of a stable, peaceful and democratic Palestinian State is in Israel's long-term security interests. However, the ongoing process of settlement expansion and the legalization of outposts could undermine the efforts of the international community to achieve tangible progress in the peace process. On the other hand, we fully understand the aspirations of the people of Israel to live in peace within secure borders. Therefore, the inability of the Palestinian authorities to prevent the acts of violence regularly perpetrated against Israeli citizens is of serious concern.

Let me stress our conviction that palpable progress in the peace process can be achieved only through mutual compromises and concessions reached at the negotiation table. We firmly believe that only a negotiated settlement leading to an Israeli and a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security is realistic. For the Israelis, it would mean a life free from violence and the daily fear of terror, and for the Palestinians, finally, a chance to live freely in a State of their own.

Everybody seems to share a common vision that there is no alternative to the peace process. Ukraine, which supports the efforts of the Quartet and regional countries aimed at achieving a settlement of the conflict, favours the early resumption of direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. We believe that direct talks between the parties are the best way to achieve a peaceful solution, as no unilateral steps will solve the key problems facing the peace process.

At the same time, it is quite obvious that it is not enough just to demand action from the Israeli and the Palestinian sides. Ultimate success will depend on a genuine commitment by all interested parties. Diplomatic efforts must be redoubled so as to contain and de-escalate the latest wave of violence and unlock Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

In this light, we believe that the French initiative to convene an international conference aimed at recreating the momentum for the resumption of talks deserves serious consideration. I can also assure the Council that Ukraine remains steadfast in its support for any effort to restore the hope that a two-State solution can be achieved through negotiations.

Speaking of wider Middle East regional security, we cannot but underscore the importance of the ongoing efforts to resolve the conflicts in Syria and Yemen. The Syrian crisis is probably the gravest regional crisis and one of the biggest security challenges the world has faced recently. We are convinced that the final point of destination of the Syrian political process is the establishment of a credible, inclusive, non-sectarian

governance transition body, followed by a new constitution and elections.

At present, we are at a critical juncture in the efforts to reach a long-overdue settlement in Syria. The ongoing second round of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva is cause for hope, but at the same time it underscores the challenges that lay ahead.

Where are we after the two rounds of talks? Unfortunately, there have been no profound changes in the situation. We see the Syrian regime continuing its obstructive approach to each of the three pillars of the settlement of the current Syrian crisis: the cessation of hostilities, a political transition and humanitarian access.

On Yemen, we are cautiously optimistic and encouraged by the fact that the United Nations-brokered ceasefire that started on 10 April is holding, despite minor violations. This certainly creates a conducive environment for the talks in Kuwait, which were to start today but were postponed, as we have just learned with regret.

The lack of meaningful dialogue during this round of talks could have disastrous results. The only ones to benefit from this would be terrorist groups, which are increasingly active in Yemen. Therefore we believe that it is also important that this opportunity be taken to intensify efforts to drive back Da'esh and Al-Qaida in Yemen.

The rapidly evolving threat of violent extremism cannot be contained within the boundaries of any region. It benefits from existing conflicts and continues to destabilize countries across the Middle East. We must address the root causes that led to this challenge in the first place. Therefore, to prevent the further spread of violent extremism, we need to work harder to resolve the unprecedented humanitarian crisis unfolding in this part of the world. The recent refugee crisis in Europe is yet another reminder of the fact that we cannot turn a blind eye to the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Syria, Libya, Iraq and Yemen.

I hope that the tireless efforts of the wider international community and the Council will yield results and that the vicious circle of violence in the Middle East will finally be broken.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

At the outset, I should like to express our condolences and sympathy to the Governments and the peoples of Japan and Ecuador. We are certain that they will overcome their difficulties and rebuild their countries as soon as possible.

I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing, and we appreciate the efforts by the Secretariat and the Secretary-General himself for advancing the peace process in the Middle East.

The question of Palestine is the core of the Middle East question and underpins peace in the Middle East. It is the shared responsibility of the international community to safeguard the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people. At present, the situation between Palestine and Israel is grim. Violent conflicts are on the rise, the peace talks have come to an impasse, the security situation has deteriorated, and humanitarian disasters have intensified.

The conflict between Palestine and Israel poses the danger of continuous escalation, with the spillover effect also on the rise. A comprehensive and fair solution to the Palestinian question is in the interests of all sides. The international community should take swift action and focus its efforts on the following aspects.

First, we must stay the right course: establishing an independent State of Palestine and peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel. Establishing a Palestinian State with full sovereignty, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people as well as the key to resolving the question of Palestine. Intra-Palestine reconciliation could facilitate the establishment of the State of Palestine.

Secondly, peace talks, as the only way forward, must continue. If they stall, this could exacerbate differences, incite hatred and drag Palestine and Israel into a vicious circle of escalating violence in which both sides would pay a heavy price. The use of force is never a solution. The earlier the peace talks start, the sooner the people of Palestine and Israel will benefit. It is only by resuming negotiations at an early date that it will be possible to achieve peace and stability between Palestine and Israel and the region. This is in the fundamental interests of both sides.

Thirdly, in promoting the peace process we must abide by the principle of land for peace, the two-State solution, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant

United Nations resolutions. These are important outcomes achieved by the international community following difficult negotiations and serve as important guidance for advancing the peace process in the Middle East. On this basis, all sides should stay the course and help to promote a political solution.

Fourthly, both Palestine and Israel should take specific steps to move the peace process forward. Israel must first demonstrate its sincerity by taking practical steps to stop its settlement activities, cease the demolition of Palestinian properties and stop the violence against innocent civilians. It should lift the blockade on Gaza so as to create conditions conducive to the resumption of talks. At the same time, the legitimate security concerns of the States of the region should also be respected.

Fifthly, in order to advance the peace process, the international community should provide vital guarantees. The international community recently intensified its efforts to resolve the Palestinian question, with new ideas and innovative thinking, including creating an international support group, convening an international peace conference on the Palestinian question, and cultivating forces for peace in the Middle East. The international community should strengthen coordination, turn the positive momentum into concrete action and make every effort to achieve realistic and operable results. The Security Council should respond positively to the legitimate demands of the Palestinians and the Arab States and give serious consideration to draft resolutions on providing international protection to the Palestinian people and ending the expansion and construction of settlements. It should take the necessary actions to promote the relaunching of peace talks.

Sixthly, the international community should do its best to improve the humanitarian situation in Palestine and continue to advance its economic reconstruction. China calls upon Israel to cooperate with the international aid efforts by completely lifting the blockade on Gaza. All parties should respond positively to the United Nations aid plan for Palestine and scaled-up assistance to Gaza. They should engage economic cooperation with Palestine so that the humanitarian situation and the climate for survival on the ground will improve and the Palestinian people will be able to see hope.

China has always supported the Palestinian people's struggle for its legitimate national rights and has worked to promote peace and negotiations. In 2013, President Xi Jinping made a four-point proposal for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli issue. During his visit to the Middle East in January 2016, President Xi reiterated that China would firmly support the just cause of the Palestinian people. The Chinese Government's Special Envoy on Middle East affairs has been actively engaged in efforts to promote peace and negotiations. Every year, China provides economic assistance to Palestine through the United Nations or bilaterally for improving the welfare of the Palestinian people.

Last January, China decided to provide RMB50 million of free aid to Palestine. China is ready to join the international community in a continued effort to promote a bona fide solution of the Israeli-Palestinian issue. As a steadfast supporter of, and facilitator for, peace in the Middle East, China has been working actively for a peaceful political settlement of the questions in Syria, Yemen, Libya, among other hotspots, with a view to achieving peace and stability in the Middle East at an early date.

With regard to the Syrian issue, the agreement between the parties on the cessation of hostilities is holding. Progress has been achieved in the field of humanitarian relief and the peace talks in Geneva are on track. The international community should continue to support the Secretary-General's Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura in his good offices and make the following efforts.

First, it should support United Nations relief agencies in their efforts to expand humanitarian relief activities. The countries concerned should strengthen communication and coordination with the Government of Syria to facilitate the process.

Secondly, it should ensure that all the Syrian parties will continue to abide by the agreement on the cessation of hostilities so as to continue to ease the situation.

Thirdly, it should promote progress in the peace talks in Geneva and encourage the parties to follow the principle of moving from the easy to the difficult, starting with the issues where consensus exists in order to produce a timely result and promote confidence-building.

Fourthly, it should step up the international fight against terrorism and join hands in combating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist organizations listed by the Council.

The Chinese Government appointed Ambassador Xie Xiaoyan as its Special Envoy for the Syrian crisis. As always, China will promote the political process for a settlement of the Syrian question.

On the question of Yemen, the nationwide cessation of hostilities by the Yemeni parties and the new round of political dialogue in Kuwait signify a return to the political track of consultation and dialogue on the question. We hope that the Yemeni parties will honour their commitment to abide by the cessation of hostilities agreement and demonstrate political will in the national dialogue by tackling issues such as the military conflict, security arrangements and the restoration of State institutions, on the one hand, and focus on the establishment of an inclusive political system in Yemen and the formulation of a political solution that meets Yemen's reality and accommodates the concerns of all parties, on the other. All parties to the conflict should actively cooperate with the United Nations humanitarian relief efforts and provide safe and unimpeded access to humanitarian relief items in order to ease the humanitarian situation on the ground.

On the question of Libya, recently the Libyan parties made an important headway in implementing the Libyan political agreement. The Presidential Council of the Government of National Accord moved into the capital to start its work, but the country's deep-rooted problems have yet to be completely resolved, while the external environment is highly complex. Efforts should be made to promote synergy between Libya's internal efforts and external political support to further consolidate the current state of affairs. Libya should adhere to a political process that is led by Libyans and open to all parties. They should work hard to defuse conflicts, achieve national reconciliation and adopt measures that are in keeping with the popular will and the national choice. The international community should urge the Libyan parties to join and fully implement the Libyan political agreement, ensure safe and smooth proceedings by the Presidential Council and settle differences through dialogue and consultation.

Countries in the Middle East are all confronted with the formidable challenge of terrorism. The fight against terrorism is closely connected with the settlement of the hotspot issues in the Middle East. Increasing cooperation against terrorism is a joint responsibility of the States of the region and of the international community. All the parties concerned, within the framework of the United Nations, should adopt common measures, resolutely crack down on the spreading of ideologies of violent extremism and terrorism, sever the channels of financing for terrorism and stop foreign terrorist flows in order to create favourable conditions for the political resolution of hotspot issues. With regard to counter-terrorism, there should be no double standards. Neither should terrorism be linked with a specific ethnicity or religion.

China is ready to work with the international community in a joint effort to find a way out of the chaos in the Middle East in order to reduce conflicts and suffering, create more tranquility and human dignity there and so that peace, stability and development may prevail soon.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I would like appeal to speakers to deliver their statements at a reasonable speed in order that interpretation may be provided accurately.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development and Cooperation of Sweden.

Ms. Lövin (Sweden): I would like to align itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union later this afternoon, but I would like to take this opportunity to make a statement in my national capacity.

Let me begin by encouraging the Yemeni parties to engage without delay in the United Nations-facilitated peace talks, which were scheduled to begin today in Kuwait. Those talks will hopefully bring us closer to a political solution in Yemen. Sweden welcomes the cessation of hostilities in place since 10 April, and we urge all parties to respect it. The massive humanitarian needs must be met. Sweden is among the largest humanitarian donors in Yemen, with contributions of over $50 million since the conflict began.

Making the Syria talks in Geneva a success is an enormous challenge, but the world cannot afford to fail. Five years of horrific warfare must be brought to an end. A political transition must be achieved. The

Syrian people deserve to live in peace and democracy. For the talks to succeed, all the parties must fully implement the resolutions of the Security Council. While the cessation of hostilities seems to be broadly holding, I am gravely concerned by the slowing down in humanitarian access. In particular, I am appalled by reports that medicines and medical equipment are being removed from humanitarian convoys, costing innocent lives. That is completely unacceptable.

Sweden supports the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, not least by funding Syrian women's participation. Moreover, Sweden is assisting the Syrian people in three ways.

First, we are stepping up resilience funding through our new $200 million Syria Crisis Strategy.

Secondly, we are increasing our humanitarian aid, amounting to over $300 million.

Thirdly, Sweden has received over 120,000 refugees who have fled Syria, one of the highest numbers in Europe.

Sweden recognizes that the neighbouring countries, especially Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, are under immense pressure. That is why our Syria crisis strategy includes support for those countries' actions as well.

Next year will mark 50 years of the occupation of Palestine. All of us are aware of the urgency of the situation on the ground and the absence of a political solution. The two-State solution is fading away before our very eyes. We are seeing continued violence and the rapid continuation of settlement construction. We are seeing unprecedented numbers of demolitions of Palestinian homes and infrastructure.

The settlements are illegal and an obstacle to peace. Settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States. A fundamental change in the settlement policy is needed, particularly in East Jerusalem and Area C. Such a change would increase economic opportunities, empower Palestinian institutions and enhance stability and security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Sweden stands firmly against terrorism. All acts of violence against civilians, including the horrific attack on the civilian bus in Jerusalem today, are despicable and must be condemned by all. Yet security measures alone will not end the violence. The underlying causes of the conflict must be addressed. Only then will the violence come to an end. Only then will peace and stability prevail. Only then will the citizens in Israel and Palestine be able to live their lives in dignity.

The situation in Gaza remains critical. Recent rocket attacks from Gaza and the Israeli air strike in retaliation show the urgency of the situation. They are reminders of the risk of further violent escalation. In a couple of years, the lack of potable water will be irreversible. The isolation of Gaza must end therefore, and reconstruction must be fast-tracked.

The European Union and Sweden have called upon all the parties to guarantee unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza for humanitarian organizations and other international actors, including State representatives, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

In order to save the prospects of a two-State solution and counter the growing hopelessness among youth, the international community must move from words to action. We must help the parties to move forward by creating new dynamics and momentum for a meaningful peace process to end the occupation. Sweden therefore fully supports the French initiative on an international peace conference, as a way for the parties and the world to recommit to the two-State solution. Sweden is encouraged by the increased Quartet activity,and looks forward to the publication of the announced Quartet report.

The Security Council has a central role to play and must shoulder its responsibility to uphold its resolutions and the Charter of the United Nations. If we, the international community, are serious about our commitment to the two-State solution, we have important work to do in the months ahead.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.25 p.m.